

I

In Which a Woman Tells
The Truth About Herself.

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Is it possible for a woman to write the truth about herself? It has been attempted often, perhaps not often with success. In the belief that it can be done, I have set myself to write what follows; to write the bare truth as far as it is known to me without flinching. It is not the portrait of an ideal woman which results, but of a woman of the world, not quite the basest of her kind but farther yet from the best. Let those who read, discern, and let those who are without sin first cast a stone.

"If it be indiscretion so to publish one's errors, yet there is no great danger that it pass into example and custom."—*Cotton's Montaigne*.

I

I WAS eighteen and still a child in emotions and perceptions although clever at books, when I first realized that my mother was dissatisfied with me and why. I had, the week before, been graduated from High School with my class, which was composed of boys and girls in nearly equal numbers. They were all my good friends, but better than any of them I liked my neighbor, Irving Lloyd, returned from college a Senior. We had played together when we were children, studied together through the years that followed and remained good comrades and intimate friends without a trace on the part of either one of us of sentiment or self-consciousness in our relations.

I had been half reclining in a hammock all the afternoon of that June day, idling away the

warm hours as I felt that I had a right to do after the serious work in school which had preceded graduation. The hammock hung on the secluded west veranda, overlooking our tangled and neglected old garden. Irving had spent an hour or more on the steps near me, pretending to read "Adonais" aloud, but in reality doing nothing most of the time.

My mother came to the French window of the little library and stood looking at us. Irving spoke to her, then presently rose, picked up his student's cap from the step beside him and with a careless good-by walked away down the grass-grown brick walk to the gap in the hedge through which he could enter his own garden. I put up my hand in a careless attempt to conceal a yawn as he retreated. Then I saw that my mother was watching me intently and there was a shade of annoyance on her face. She was a beautiful woman even then, at forty.

"I wish you would pay a little more attention to your appearance, Sidney," she said with unusual emphasis. "I have never seen a girl

of eighteen who was so utterly indifferent to her looks. Your attitude as you lounge in that hammock is unpardonable, and would be even if you had pretty feet. You have not changed your gown since morning. It is tumbled and untidy, and so is your hair. You simply can not afford to let yourself go after this fashion."

My mother was even-tempered, languid rather than incisive in her usual speech, but some latent feeling I could detect, was gathering in cumulative effect as she went on speaking. I had risen from the hammock and stood facing her, respectfully I believe, but by no means penitently. Something in my attitude or expression, not defiance, but ill-concealed indifference, stung her to sudden sharpness.

"Sidney, I must tell you plainly that a girl who is not pretty must take more pains for that very reason to make herself attractive."

She flushed as she spoke and I saw that the words hurt her far more than they did me.

"But why should I care particularly to make myself attractive, mother?" I asked with per-

fect straightforwardness. "The people I like like me as I am. This gown is really not so bad. See, it is perfectly clean."

A strange look passed over her face, and she sighed impatiently.

"There is no reason, I guess," she said under her breath. "Every other girl has by instinct the little graces and niceties of the toilet—those things which make up for so much—" here she broke off and returned to her work in the library.

I pitied my mother, for I saw that she was grievously disappointed in me and keenly stung by my deficiencies. It did not occur to me to pity myself. I was a happy, homely, wholehearted, healthy young thing who had thus far never waked up to consciousness of the losses and crosses which a homely woman has to bear.

I went slowly up to my room, bent on dressing myself with care to please my mother. First of all I had a wild rummage through the chaos of my upper bureau-drawer to find some

of "the little graces and niceties of the toilet" which might redeem me in her eyes. I remember finding a tumbled lawn fichu which I drew with some care about my throat and shoulders over the blue muslin dress which I had proceeded to put on. I fastened the fichu with a small pin in which I clasped a pink rose with considerable care and some pride in the effect. Then I surveyed myself anxiously. When a girl's mother tells her in good set terms that she is not pretty she has reason to believe in the sincerity of the utterance. So far as I can remember this was the first time I had ever given any serious consideration to my looks, and now it was for my mother's sake, not for my own, that I narrowly scanned the face and figure in my glass. I felt with a genuine pang that she suffered because I was not pretty and piquant and pleasing like other girls. It was a shame, when she was so beautiful herself. Why could I not have looked like her instead of like my father's family? It was from them that I inherited my big frame, my freckles and

dull yellow hair, my whitish eyelashes and long nose.

When I came down-stairs I went and stood by my mother's work-table with my hands behind me as I had done when I was a child to have her pronounce judgment as to whether I had washed my face successfully.

"Do you like me now?" I asked rather humbly.

She looked up and then broke into uncontrollable laughter, but I could see that there were tears in her eyes while she laughed.

"Oh, Sidney, you are impossible!" she cried. "That prim little rosebud, that tired old fichu, that conscientious, anxious look! Never mind, dear, be good and let who will be pretty!"

"But mother, I want you to look at my neck and see if it isn't rather good." I had turned my gown away at the throat. "See, it is quite white it seems to me, and you know, when I looked in the glass just now it struck me that my mouth and chin were just a little like yours." I added this timidly.

She smiled at me tenderly and looked with a certain amused incredulity at the lower part of my face.

“You are a dear child,” she said, “but plainly Heaven meant you for a boy.”

II

I HAVE concluded, in looking back, that the little incident which I have just related had a certain importance in the story of my life. It is my conviction that my mother definitely concluded at that time that I was not made for love and leisure, for social success, even of a very modest sort, or for early marriage. She therefore decided to have me go in for whatever distinction I could win as an intellectual girl, and accordingly in the fall I went to college. I perfectly understood that my mother would have preferred to have me take the other line. Her ideal daughter would have loved to embroider, to practise duets and read poetry or novels with her, would have made charming gowns for herself in the long quiet mornings which she would

have worn with telling effect in the evenings, with several interesting affairs of the heart always pending, as a result. The quiet old house with its good mahogany furniture and my father's paintings, would have made a perfect setting for all that kind of thing, and my mother would well have fitted her rôle of matron, still young and beautiful, with an equally charming daughter to administer. I remember I did try conscientiously to sew and embroider, but I had no knack at either. I hated piano practise and modern novels equally, and upon poetry my mother and I never could agree.

As for affairs of the heart I had less knack at them than at embroidery. Irving Lloyd hung around as he always had, ready to take me to ball games and tennis tournaments, but neither of us developed any sentiment beyond our established comradeship, and beside him no man came my way. I remember sometimes wishing that the youths who clustered around the other girls like bees around clover, would sometimes cluster around me because I knew in

my inmost heart that this would be highly pleasing to my mother. But they failed to cluster. In September I went to college.

At the end of my Freshman year I brought a classmate home with me to spend a month, a girl whom I ardently admired. She was a Southern girl, Clarice, and I had written reams of description of her qualities to my mother, my girl friends and to Irving with whom I corresponded steadily.

The night of our arrival I had a curious sense in my mother's first glance from Clarice to me and back again, that she thought my valor greater than my discretion in bringing home this delightful creature to whom I must inevitably act as a foil. My own feeling was that my mother would understand better when she knew Clarice, how noble and true-hearted and altogether admirable she was. I was full of chivalrous devotion to my new friend and sure that every honor paid to her could give me nothing but the keenest satisfaction.

Only a few days passed in quiet summer

idleness at home before the young set in our little town awoke to the discovery of the rare and radiant stranger. Clarice was not only extremely pretty but she had marked facility in adapting herself to her environment, and, like most Southerners, she was very versatile. Her voice in singing was not extraordinary, but she could use it to extraordinary effect, and in conversation her Southern accent was declared irresistible. So also were her eyes, her gay abandon, her multitudinous pretty costumes. In fine, she carried everything before her and there was no longer any lack of men clustering around our house. My mother was often silently beaten off the scene before the throng of Clarice's admirers, who presented themselves at all times of day and evening.

My part, that of the plain, loyal, serviceable friend who must furnish the platform and stage properties for the little summer comedy, was clearly indicated. I threw myself into it with tireless enthusiasm, dressed Clarice for all the parties where she was the belle and I the wall-

flower; prepared dainty lunches and suppers for her adorers, kept out of the way at the right time, drew off the tiresome people who came at the wrong time, and kept up a kind of Greek chorus of praise of my friend throughout the performance. That is, for the first two weeks and a little more.

I do not think I was an especially unselfish girl, but I was very ardent in my friendships and I see now that I must have had a somewhat unusual capacity for self-devotion. I was so very proud of Clarice, and so confident that no one could admire her more than she deserved. All the while my right hand was Irving Lloyd, the same true, trusty, non-emotional good friend to me as ever. He gathered the people together for picnics, and worked up all the necessary and tiresome details of our various festivities, seeking nothing for himself but the satisfaction of helping me to carry out my desire of entertaining Clarice worthily. Indeed once or twice a spark of something akin to sentiment was struck out between us as we worked together for this

same end, his efforts being, as it seemed to me, based primarily upon his desire to give me pleasure.

I had never seen Irving alone with Clarice for a moment nor had he even sought to converse with her as all the other men vied with each other in doing, until on a Saturday evening out at Mallard Lake. We had been having a gipsy camp-fire and as the evening wore away and I was collecting wraps and baskets for the return, I noticed Clarice standing on the narrow strip of pebbly beach under the shade of a great tree. Irving was leaning over the stern of a skiff drawn half out of the water, with his face upturned to hers. His eyes were full of ardor and appeal, such a look as I had never seen in them, nor supposed the fellow capable of. It gave me a strange physical sensation, almost akin to faintness as I drew hastily back unseen by either of them. In a moment more Clarice sprang into the carriage which was waiting for us, half a dozen hands outstretched to help her. I had taken my seat already, unnoticed and un-

assisted. Irving returned with a different company, and I did not see him again.

Always before I had gone to Clarice's room after the evening's gaiety and helped her with her toilet, while she recounted her various experiences, small triumphs, quarrels and sentimental interchanges, and we laughed over them in girlish fashion together. To-night I bade her good-night at my door, pleading fatigue. It was my heart that was tired, and less with anything which had happened than with a heavy and painful premonition. And yet, why did I care? Irving was simply my good comrade, nothing more.

I had put on a thin dressing-gown and was combing my hair before my very plainly equipped bureau, when I heard a step on the porch at the front of the house, just below my window and immediately there was a rustle by my door of flowing drapery. I knew on the instant it was Clarice in the sumptuous silk negligée in which she luxuriated on occasion. My door was opened softly then and Clarice whis-

pered, "Sidney, darling, I left my cape in the other carriage and some of them said they would bring it over. I will run down for a moment. Go right to bed. I will be sure the door is locked all right."

I suppose I knew instinctively what Irving would do, for I paid no attention to what happened at the front door, but instantly I hastened to the open window in the hall overlooking the box-bordered garden at the rear of the house where the ranks of tall white lilies showed spectral now in the gloom. I crouched on the floor in the window niche, behind the curtains and in a moment I heard the steps I expected, coming very quietly around the house, and saw Clarice, the trail of her long robe caught up over one arm, as she passed down the walk with Irving beside her. For half an hour I knelt there while they passed slowly backward and forward, her figure graceful, flowing, seductive in every line; his instinct with masculine vigor—tense with attention. At last they stopped on the veranda steps, out of my sight but not out of my hearing.

"Why must I go? You let other men stay far later," I heard Irving's voice; then heard my name murmured by Clarice.

Then he spoke again, very slowly, his voice low but strangely distinct.

"You know perfectly well that there is nothing, could be nothing, between Sidney and me but friendship. She is a very good friend. She was made for friendship, but you were made for——"

"Hush," she interrupted. I had before this learned Clarice's Southern art of leading a man to the verge and then stopping him; I was learning now her prime social axiom, to sacrifice every woman to any man. "I can not let you speak like this, but I am glad to know that you—care—a little. I never dreamed of it, you see. I supposed you wholly devoted to Sidney or this could not—" and here her voice seemed to falter and I heard them pass around the house.

In another moment the front door opened and before it closed I was back in my own room with my door locked.

That night I did not sleep at all. It was the night when in some sense at least the child in me died and the woman was born in pangs of anguish and torment. And yet no element of tragedy was present save of a commonplace sort. Irving was in no way pledged to me nor was Clarice pledged not to allure him. Not one word they had said was distinctly treacherous. The very innermost sting lay in the fact that it was all distinctly true—truest of all that I was made for friendship while Clarice was made for love. Yes, what awoke in me that night was not the prime passion of a great love, the supreme energy of a woman, but the instinct of wounded pride, the passion for the power to awaken admiration, the desire not so much to love as to be loved. But this passion, noble or ignoble, sprang “full-statured in an hour,” and with a power which carried all before it. Hatred and anger awoke in me where love and trust had been—hatred for Clarice and a furious anger for Irving. I did not know whether both or either had meant to trick and to betray

me. I knew it was done. I looked back upon my devotion to Clarice, my self-effacement for her sake, with a sick loathing, suddenly seeing the selfishness which had been content to receive and absorb all. The thought of the time that remained of her visit stretched before me as an impossible penance before which my very soul fainted. Daylight filled my room and I started mechanically upon the day's duties full of inner chaos, confusion and blinding pain.

III

I SPENT the week which followed in a kind of frozen fury. Clarice felt the change in temperature instantly and responded by flinging off all further disguise and permitting Irving to burn incense at her shrine freely and with no attempt at concealment.

"Irving has now gone over to the majority," I said with bitterness to my mother after two days had passed.

"He went over long ago—the very first day," she replied, "but you did not see it, dear. Be careful not to show your feelings too plainly. What has happened is only what was inevitable."

In spite of this admonition, I could not for the time conceal entirely the spasms of jealous pain under which my soul was writhing. Had not Clarice enough in the homage and flattery of all the rest? Could she not have spared me

my one good friend and comrade? Was there no such thing as faith or fealty? Did a pretty face, a gay voice, a dainty foot, a laughing eye suffice to break down the friendship of years? For our friendship, Irving's and mine, was broken to pieces hopelessly. I had flashed out on the Sunday evening a few scornful words which had met with a chilling rebuke from him. From that hour every word and glance of his seemed to reveal to me how unlovely and unattractive I made myself in his sight by my display of injured feeling. This was powerless, however, to subdue or allay my agitation which I have no doubt was visible to every one in our little circle through all that wretched week. Then, of a sudden, my pride came to my rescue, touched to life by a pitying word and glance from one of the girls. I had borne much, however ill, but to be an object of general pity was more than could be borne. I remember going to my room and locking myself in and having it out with myself. I saw plainly what a cheap, pitiable, spiritless rôle I had been playing, and

decided that from that moment no one should detect in me a trace of my burning wound. I had worn my heart upon my sleeve long enough for daws to peck at. I remember that I rose and stretched out both hands, clasped tight together. I stood at my dressing-table confronting myself in the glass, but seeing nothing, and said audibly, so that my own nerves vibrated with the sound in the silent room, "I will grasp the situation with both hands and I will control it. They shall learn that I am above them both."

With the last words the tension relaxed and I perceived my own reflection. My eyes were shining with a light they had never had before, my cheeks were flushed, my mouth had a new expression, proud, severe and yet passionate, which I saw with surprise gave me something akin to beauty for the moment. My unconscious pose was full of fire and energy. My hands dropped and I stood long studying myself in the glass, thinking hard. I saw that, for all my acknowledged plainness, I had dramatic possibilities of which until now I had never dreamed.

My skin had the transparent quality which is capable of sudden illumination, my figure had a certain expressive power, my hands, the singular, subtle sensitiveness of form and touch that my mother's had. All these things I reckoned rapidly, with the artist eye which was mine as the birthright of my father's daughter, but which I had never before turned upon myself. I saw that although not conventionally handsome, and farther yet from prettiness, I was by no means insignificant and for a moment I even dared to dream that it was in me to attain a higher attractive power than that exercised by Clarice. What I had theretofore lacked more than beauty or any other thing, was self-consciousness, say, rather, sex-consciousness. Allurement is preceded between men and women by the desire to allure. This desire had heretofore slept in me. Now it was awake.

My first instinct, however, was rather fine. It was not to seek satisfaction or amends by stimulating such possible personal resources as were mine. I scorned the idea of resorting to

such means indeed, and sought the higher moral satisfaction of putting myself in the right where hitherto I had been in the wrong. I would seek the strong position rather than grovel longer in the weak one. In my heart I believed myself a greater person than either Clarice or Irving, and the sum of my long deliberation was a repetition of the utterance with which I began: "I will show myself superior to them both."

I came down from my height and from my seclusion to find Clarice entering the library where Irving Lloyd sat in neighborly familiarity reading a magazine. She wore a fresh white gown, produced from her armory for the first time, and she was as dainty and pretty in it as a rose. Instead of following the line (adopted since that crucial night) of chilling indifference, I met Clarice with an affectionate caress and the exclamation, "How utterly charming! How is it Clare, you manage always to look prettiest in the last new thing you put on? Such a darling dress! Isn't it, Irving?"

My friend had risen and stood gazing a lit-

tle wide of my eyes, in obvious embarrassment. He murmured an inarticulate response while Clarice blushed and her expression betrayed in her first surprise quite as much annoyance as pleasure. I discerned at once, with my quickened instinct, that she had been on the whole rather enjoying my unlovely display of jealous and wounded feeling. I knew as well at that moment as if I had actually heard her, how she would have deplored to Irving that poor Sidney had such a dreadful disposition, so impossible to get along with no matter how hard she tried to please her—Could he understand what *could* be the matter? etc. Stimulated by this perception I continued in the same cordial, free-hearted tone, “Irving, why don’t you take Clarice up on the hill this afternoon for that view? The air is so very clear as I noticed just now, and you have plenty of time. We can have tea a half-hour later as well as not.”

They looked at each other in a way which I interpreted to mean that something of the kind had been their intention, but had been thrown

into uncertainty by my inopportune appearance.

“It would be a good time for that walk, wouldn’t it?” responded Irving slowly, with a very poor attempt at spontaneity. “But you must go with us, you know, Sidney.”

I bit back a little smile of bitterness with the thought that he was at least as sincere as I.

“How I wish I could, Irving!” I exclaimed, “but I absolutely must go down to a committee meeting at the Library at four. You and Clarice will have to try and endure each other unassisted. Of course it will be dreadfully hard for you both! Poor things! But go now—let me see you start!” and I laughed gaily with a little playful gesture of driving them forth.

They started immediately, but their blank and puzzled faces as they turned down the street struck me as indicating a situation so inexpressibly ridiculous that I fled into the dining-room laughing excitedly.

My mother sat there alone. She had established her work-table there of late since Clarice

and her retinue laid the rest of the house under requisition.

“My dear!” she murmured, a little frown of disapproval on her face.

“Have you been here all the time?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Then do give me your opinion. How did I do my new part?”

“I thought you overdid it,” she said quietly.

“Oh dear!” I cried ruefully. “I thought as a hypocrite I was making a huge hit. But no matter, I shall get it down fine after a while. Now if they only come back engaged! I having clearly sent them forth for the not-to-be-dodged-nor-avoided purpose—then——”

“Then what will you do?”

“Say ‘Bless you, my children!’ of course, and live happy forever after!”

My mother looked at me with a long pondering look.

IV

THE following week Clarice departed. Just before she left the house, when no unpleasant consequences could reach her, she confided to me that she and Irving were engaged. "And it is all your doing, Sidney, you wonderful, noble, unselfish, old darling." Then with apparent sincerity she began to cry. "You have simply been our good angel," she sobbed; "and some way I have—such—a guilty feeling."

I assuaged this contrition with gratifying success, for the sun came out again as the carriage drove off and Irving appeared as escort to the train.

Clarice did not return to college. Being engaged was an occupation in itself. However I heard repeatedly of the very gay life she was leading in Baltimore that winter, and just after my return to college after the holidays, a short

note from Irving told me that his engagement was broken and he was about starting for Germany, there to finish his preparation for his profession. He was to be an architect. His only comment on the situation was, "The thing was wrong in the beginning and has been wrong all the way through."

That year, the second of my college life, I developed rapidly in some respects. Always given to athletic exercise I gained some little prominence for my proficiency in running games, in skating and swimming; and, after a period of determined effort, I achieved distinction as a dancer. These various exercises added to the power and to the expressiveness, flexibility and grace of my body. I had ceased growing tall; my bony structure, I thanked Heaven, seemed at last completed, and the mysterious glands and things which carry on that part of the process took their turn and rounded out my proportions hitherto so angular.

The girls suddenly discovered that I ought to wear décolleté dress, that "I had a neck." I

had always thought so myself and was highly gratified that my points were at last discovered by others.

In my Junior year I was invited to spend the Christmas holidays at the house of a class-mate whose father had a magnificent "place" twenty miles from New York. My mother had awakened with a species of incredulous delight to a perception that her Ugly Duckling was not quite hopeless. She now spent much time and thought on a series of costumes for this event. The example of the excellent effect of these weapons in Clarice's case had not been lost upon either of us. And still I was a long way from being a Clarice. I was still undeniably in the ranks of the homely girls; but it is a wise man who told the world some time ago that the homely woman is the formidable woman after all.

The first night that I appeared at dinner at the house of my friend in décolleté dress (a small dance was to follow), I felt a curiously mingled sense of diffidence and power. I be-

lieved myself at the moment to be, actually and visibly, ineffective, but potentially a person to be reckoned with. I believe the expression which my eyes sought with only partial success to conceal as I met the world that night, was challenge. I stood, as it were, with lance in rest, armed, tense, ready for action. However, to all appearance I was just a tall, demi-blonde girl in a white gown with a figure which would be better when it was more filled out, a fair skin with a few freckles, a long nose, a rather pleasant mouth with perfect teeth, and a really good chin and neck. Nothing remarkable any way, you see, and yet to myself every inch of my person under my white gown and my white skin was *so* remarkable, so vitally individual, so full of a tingling sense of young, pulsating life! I loved my hands because they were so fine of touch and tint, and my long, firm, untired limbs, which could dance all night and hardly know it; in fine, I loved the body of me with a hearty, animal relish and yet I was not strongly sensuous. The exposure of my person that night for

the first time in my life gave me a distinctly painful shock. I suppose no woman ever thus reveals herself to the eyes of strangers without first trampling upon the primitive instincts of modesty and reserve which must be slain before one enters the great world.

This was in effect my first passage at arms with men since I had put on my armor. How would I come off?

I have no social triumphs to chronicle. No man surrendered to my charms in any alarming manner that night or throughout my visit; but I was satisfied. I found that, in spite of the fact that I was no beauty, I could draw out as much attention and admiration from men as I knew what to do with. I think in fact a slight contempt arose within me as I first found what an easy prey they were. Birth and breeding, together with my dancing, my gaiety, my high spirits, and the refinement of person and speech which were my heritage, seemed sufficient. I found how very different, moreover, playing guest was from playing host. It was the part

of the men I met to find me charming, and of my friend to make my path easy. I looked back at the reverse of the present situation, at the summer when Clarice (now married) was my guest, and realized how very transient and meaningless a large part of the devotion to her had been. I received as much now myself, and I saw through it as I had failed to do then.

However, dating from the time of that visit, I can see that self- and sex-consciousness became fully awakened in me, and the craving for the admiration of men grew by what it fed on. I began to perceive that the one unpardonable fault in a woman, to the adolescent masculine mind, is indifference to masculine attention. The girl who cares impartially and invariably for the devotion of men, who brightens under it and pales without it, who seeks it and schemes for it and runs to meet it, is the girl who receives it in any great extent or marked degree. A natural concomitant this, I suppose, of pairing time.

I now looked back upon the girl who lounged

in a hammock that June day, careless of her dress and attitude, yawning palpably in the face of a perfectly desirable and eligible cavalier, as no more my real self than the Sphinx was myself. I understood one as little as the other. Still less did I understand my present self, however, and the line on which I was developing. The truth was this—I was not pretty enough to draw to myself the men I met without an effort; therefore I made the effort and with constantly increasing address and skill. But I was no uncouth, country hoyden running after the male of her species. On the whole, as I look back, I see that at twenty-two I was already a subtle and skilful coquette of a particularly refined sort.

V

IRVING LLOYD was now established as an architect in Boston. He seldom came back to his old home, and when he came it was for very brief visits. At these times he occasionally paid us a formal call, but more than that we never saw him. He was on the road to success, we heard, in his profession, and was counted a social success already, even in Boston. He had acquired a polished and distingué manner, a rather melancholy, impenetrable reserve, and marked elegance of person. He had always been a handsome fellow I saw when I came to think of it, and he was handsomer at twenty-six than at twenty. This was noticeable in him: he always did the correct thing and never overdid it. He was, as I naturally knew very well, disappointed in love. I knew further from his mother, who was our very good neighbor, that

he would never marry, that side of life being cut off to him by his unhappy affair with Clarice. This fact gave perfectly good ground for the slight tinge of melancholy in his expression and for his reserve, but these peculiarities were only indicated, if I might so say—never emphasized. In his relation to me there dwelt a possible awkwardness, a sense of disadvantage and embarrassment in view of our early intimacy and the break which had come about later. And then I was still, nominally, the friend of Clarice. He managed this, however, admirably. He bore himself toward me whenever we met with a peculiar gravity and deference, a very marked seriousness of courtesy, but with a certain underlying distance which it seemed from his point of view, we must both find impassable. To touch upon his broken engagement in words was wholly out of the question. In fact we never in his rare visits, alluded to any event of that summer, occupying ourselves in our casual conversations with the more remote past or the more inviting future.

The spring before my college graduation Irving had a long run of fever. His mother told me that as soon as he was sufficiently convalescent she should remove him from the Boston hospital and bring him home to remain the entire summer. Before I went back to college that year I interested my mother in having some improvements made in our tangled old garden. She promised me to carry out my wish to place beds of mignonette and nasturtiums beside the brick walk, and especially to have a row of sweet peas planted just inside the boundary hedge at the foot of the garden. It was our practise to spend July and August in the mountains, but we should gain some good of these friendly flowers both early and late.

When I returned home in June with my diploma and my modest portion of class honors and decorations, I was overjoyed to find that my mother had far outrun my simple ideas. The forlorn old wilderness had been wholly transformed. It was now a charming version of the old-fashioned flower-garden, the thick,

somber lines of box dividing broad, brilliant beds of poppies, larkspur and marigolds, while hollyhocks, sweet peas and sunflowers stood tall and gay against the ragged untrimmed hedge.

My mother had spent the preceding two weeks at college, sharing in all the festivities and delighting in all the honors and attentions which came my way. She brought me word that Irving Lloyd was still in Boston, but convalescent now. His mother had gone to him.

The evening of our return, the late dinner over, I went out on the west veranda and stood leaning over the rail, looking down into the garden. From the boundary hedge the smooth lawn of the Lloyd premises sloped gradually up to the terrace below their dining-room windows. Benches always stood on this terrace under some slender birch-trees. As my eyes left the bounds of my own garden, a dusky, fragrant maze now in the twilight, they discerned a masculine figure under the distant birch-trees, and a fragrance all unlike that of mignonette and sweet peas was wafted faintly over to me. A pleasant

sensation ran along the course of my veins. Plainly, Irving Lloyd was at home again. It might not be best to go to the mountains this year before August.

For forty-eight hours I remained invisible. Our veranda was as deserted as before our return, and only an occasional light in a window gave token of our presence to any eye which might have been watching or expectant. Those two days I spent deliciously in my own white bed, in the wide, cool north bed-room which my mother had refurnished for my return with charming taste. I had learned by this time a lot of fine lady ways. I was still athletic, and never I think effeminate or precisely voluptuous, but I went in for all things fragrant, dainty and alluring about my personal belongings. I detested strong perfumes, directly and obviously applied, but I considered scented baths a necessity. My wardrobe was never extravagant or over-fashionable, but I cared much for the luxury of underclothing of silk, or of cotton of cobweb fineness of texture and perfection of

handiwork; I delighted in sumptuous and delicate negligée. On my dressing-table I never could endure the heavy tinny wares of the silversmith. All my brushes and boxes were of smoothest ivory, carved only with my monogram.

I mention these habits of fastidious luxury because they have an important relation to the personality of a woman. The influence of unseen private, personal elegance, beauty and luxury is as positive in her body and bearing as it is indefinable. I had come a long way from the boyish meagerness and hardihood of my early years. My mother encouraged the change, and gratified my wishes, which were not in excess of her resources, but I think there were times when I puzzled her. She was a fine lady, too, but with a difference.

The third day after my return home, it was evening rather (we had just finished dinner), I strolled down to the foot of the garden with a watering-pot, a shallow basket and a pair of flower-scissors. The evening was very warm.

I wore a thin white dress which left neck and arms exposed. My throat was as firm and fine as ivory, and my hair behind my ears and at the nape had, I knew, a delightful ripple. My arms were white and round and strong. I felt like a young Amazon, sallying forth to combat. I had been worn, nervous, uncertain of myself at first on my return, being extremely tired. My eyes had looked burned out with excitement, my cheeks hollow. Now I was rested, and as fresh, as vigorous and elastic as a sapling. I liked myself particularly well that evening. I knew I was in good looks, and that the radiance of perfect health was almost beauty.

I passed along the rows of sweet peas just within the sparse screen of the hedge, now watering them, now snipping off a spray or two of the more striking blossoms for my basket. I hummed a little tune as I went, but very low, because I knew I might get off the key, having no ear for music. The effect of the little tune was designed for no one but myself; it gave me a certain air of careless, light-hearted preoccu-

pation. That was the air I wanted. Presently I found that the aromatic odor for which I was on the alert was perceptible. I strolled on to the opening in the hedge, the one through which Irving Lloyd used to go back and forth in our school-days. It was almost grown together now, but not completely. There I paused, swinging my basket and looking ingenuously up the grassy slope to the birch-trees on the terrace. As it was still early twilight I could plainly see my neighbor seated on the bench, a languor in his attitude noticeable even from the distance.

I hastened with frank and sincere concern up the lawn, dropping my basket when I reached him. Words of neighborly greeting were on my lips and I held out both hands. Irving rose and gave me his, looking with much kindness into my eyes. I had not for a moment pictured to myself the ravages of a fever such as he had suffered. The sunken eyes, haggard cheeks, pale lips, the chill, nerveless hands which mine held produced upon me a sharp and sudden impression. All my old habit of genuine friend-

ship asserted itself with force and sincerity. I burst into tears and exclaimed, "Oh, Irving! I did not realize how ill you have been. I am so sorry—so glad—" and I broke off because I could say not another word.

"Sit down here with me, Sidney," he said in his quiet way. "The sight of you as you look to-night is enough to make a sick man well." As I obeyed I caught a gleam in his eyes as of tears, and a sudden flush of color also betrayed the keen emotion which this simple revelation of heartfelt concern produced in him, after the many years of coldness and enforced distance. Neither of us needed to put on airs any more. It was enough to be ourselves, a practise almost forgotten in our intercourse together. The coldness and strangeness of years were annihilated.

When I left, in a few moments, for I feared to tire him, Irving came slowly with me down the lawn. At the foot of it he detained me to say, smiling half sadly,

"You have broken the path again to-night,

Sidney, through the old hedge. It is a symbol. Do you know that for years I have gone around the street-corner and up the front steps and rung your bell like a stranger?"

"And that was a symbol, too. You won't do it any more, will you?" I said, and lifted my eyes, which were still wet with tears, frankly and yet timidly to his face. It wore a look I recalled having seen in it once before, on the pebbly beach at Mallard Lake. It was a look which quickened the beating of my heart. Certainly he was very distinguished looking, most interesting, and his dark, close-clipped beard made him seem almost a stranger, after all.

My eyes fell beneath his glance. I could see my breast rise and fall tumultuously with my rapid breath.

"It shall be as you say, dearest Sidney," Irving said very gently, and then he bent and kissed my hand.

When I walked back alone up the uneven brick walk between the box borders, I knew that I should be asked to marry Irving Lloyd. I

felt a deep tenderness in my heart and a touch of solemnity, but below and above all a profound satisfaction. The old and hidden wound would be healed at last.

What was it that had been wounded?

VI

WE did not go to the mountains at all that summer. There was a spell upon us too beautiful to break.

One July morning stands out now with perfect clearness in my mind from all the rest. It was a backward eddy on the rippling stream of my content.

I had had my roll and chocolate in bed, as was my custom when at home. Then had followed the elaborate rites of washing my hair and of my bath in a tub as polished and flawless as a French china cup—the water, violet-scented, clear as crystal, first warm and relaxing, then a keen, cold shower to finish, turning my flesh pink and my muscles hard again. This accomplished, I had dressed carefully, but instead of putting on a dress had slipped into an apple-

green silk lounging robe, as the process of drying my hair was now to follow.

When I came down-stairs and stopped for a little talk with my mother in the library, she told me I looked like a July lily just bursting from its calyx. I liked the notion. I had brought from my room my white ivory comb and hand-glass; I passed out now to the west veranda, taking with me also an enormous Pompeian pink pillow from the library sofa.

The morning was warm but not oppressive, and the sunshine on my cold, wet hair gave me an agreeable sensation. I soon made myself very comfortable in the wide hammock, my head propped high on the pink pillow, the loose sleeves of my *négligée* falling back above the elbow, my feet, in gold-embroidered Turkish slippers, just showing below the billowy folds of my green drapery. My hair I shook out over the edge of the hammock and it fell to the floor in dank strands but soon began to change and grow bright and living and lustrous in the sun.

Then Irving came and found me wholly charming (as I knew he would), and kissed me on arms and throat as well as on lips and forehead, and sat down in the low armchair drawn near for him by my side. He had been my declared lover for almost a month. The old wound was healed. The affair with Clarice, I was assured, had never been more than a superficial infatuation, as fleeting on his part as on hers.

I noticed with anxiety that Irving was looking badly that morning, something of bluish pallor about his skin augmenting the general weakness of aspect which he had not yet shaken off since his fever. It was a slow convalescence. We knew that he could hardly be perfectly recovered within a year, but of late his mother had been alarmed at a suggestion of cardiac weakness, a complication most to be dreaded.

“Oh! how I wish I could give you some of my superfluous vitality,” I said, holding his cold hand in my warm vigorous grasp.

He smiled and pressed my hand to his lips,

but I saw the smile was forced, and was painfully struck by the weakness of his motions.

"Irving, won't you let that doctor from Boston come?" I said imploringly. "He understands your case so perfectly, and then he is your friend besides. Your mother thinks him the most scientific and skilful physician she knows. Do let her send for him! It worries me so that you do not get strong faster."

"How nice to think I can make a goddess worry," he said playfully. "But you can rest now. Mother has had her way and sent for Dr. Kirke already. She wired him last night." I gave a joyous exclamation the rather to conceal my instinctive dismay that such a measure had really been thought necessary.

"When will he come?"

"I have no idea. He is the busiest man I know. It is unpardonable to make him come at all, and I'll wager he will be furious when he gets here and finds there is absolutely no cause for sending for him. Please, Sidney," very meekly, "may I comb your hair?"

For answer I placed the comb in his hand and as he leaned forward and began to draw it slowly and solemnly through the long locks which were beginning to grow buoyant and fluffy, I said,

“How horrid of him to be furious! I should hate him if he was. Is he bad-tempered then?”

“Rather a grampus, I have to allow; but a royal old rock of a fellow after all. You wouldn’t like him, though.”

“Why not?”

“Well, for one thing, he is a Methodist.”

“Oh dear me, Irving! That is enough, isn’t it?”

“I thought it would strike you so. But I don’t think women do usually like him.”

“Not even Methodist women?”

“No. You see he has no conversation, no manners, except of a professional sort, no time for the society of women, and, what is worse, no taste.”

“What does he go in for?”

“Hard work and golf, and no petticoats on

the golf-links either, if he can help it. Sidney, you have the loveliest hair! Look, how long it is!"

"Isn't it a pretty color there where the sun strikes it?" I returned impartially. "But do give me the comb, Irving, you go at it in such a reverent spirit that it makes me wild. I want to give a good tug at these snarls down here," and I took the comb again from his hand.

He sat back regarding me with love-lit ardor of admiration as I leaned on one elbow and drew the comb steadily through the spun-silk mass, so lifting it to fall screen-like against the sun which streamed, dull gold, through its glinting, tangled meshes.

"What is it you are like?" he exclaimed, his eyes dark and bright with a sort of rapture, for the artist in him was strong.

Suddenly, almost at the foot of the steps, an unfamiliar muffled voice pronounced as in exclamation a single word, a word which neither of us distinguished. We both started to see that, unknown to us, a man had come down the

garden walk and had apparently heard what Irving said.

Even as I sprang from my reclining position, and sat erect against the cushions, twisting my hair with a single swift motion behind my head, Irving had run down the steps and grasped the stranger by the hand, his cheeks flushed slightly with surprise and evidently also with pleasure.

"It is Dr. Kirke, Sidney," he explained, looking back at me, with comical confusion. "What shall I do? May I bring him up? How on earth did you manage to get here so soon, Doctor?"

"By the Albany midnight express. Not a complicated process, I assure you," and without waiting to see whether I invited him to do so or not, Dr. Kirke came up the veranda steps and gave me an abrupt and yet ceremonious hand-shake, Irving introducing us a little awkwardly.

It was perfectly natural that I should experience some small confusion on being intro-

duced to a distinguished Boston physician, the friend of my fiancé in the bargain, in such dishabille. However, I knew the dishabille was becoming, as was also the blush which I felt springing to my cheeks, and as I drew myself to a seat on the hammock's edge, my green drapery flowing about me and settling into a shimmering pool on the veranda floor, my hair falling below my waist in a shining rope, my throat and arms modestly concealed, I should not have found the situation particularly unpleasing, had the man who had so abruptly intruded upon us done his part acceptably. I should not have demanded allusions to nymphs of either sea or wood. It would have been satisfactory if he had looked a reverent, unspoken admiration, a chivalrous, apologetic deference to my maiden alarm and confusion, but he did nothing of the kind. He looked at me indeed longer than I thought nice or necessary, but it was with a singularly cold, measuring glance, as if he were making a businesslike estimate of my character and person from an absolutely

impersonal point of view. It was an unmerciful look to the woman's vanity of me. It seemed to say: "I see through all your little shams and wiles. Keep them for your lover and any one else who likes them. They are lost upon me. You are simply a rather homely woman working a fine skin, a white arm and a lot of rather good hair for all they are worth and perhaps a little more."

Decidedly Dr. Kirke was neither artist, idealist, courtier nor—gentleman I was ready just then to say, being more disconcerted by that look of his and its stark indifference than I remember ever being before in my life. Metaphorically I nailed a small flag of distress to my mast, wrapped myself in reserve as in a veil and so speedily rid myself of both men. As they passed down the walk of my garden together I pleased myself with registering a good, round opinion of Dr. Kirke's undeniably heavily built figure and homely face, but I found myself again and again seeking to determine what had been that one word he had growled rather than

spoken, at the foot of the steps, before we were aware of his proximity. Had it been a sort of response to Irving's impassioned exclamation, "What is it you are like?" or had it been some foreign phrase of apology or greeting? Foreign it had certainly sounded to my ear, and yet not unfamiliar. My mother had compared me to a lily within the hour. Dr. Kirke's exclamation seemed to bear a faint, uncertain semblance of that word and yet I knew it was not the same. Whatever it was I was convinced that it was of a savage nature and that he had had no business to speak at all. My dislike of the man was fixed from that hour.

VII

WE were married in January. Irving was then fully restored to health; his profession produced sufficient income for us to live on with economy; we were both old enough to marry; we knew each other from the associations of a lifetime. There was nothing to wait for.

Nevertheless, in my secret heart I should have preferred to extend the period of betrothal indefinitely. I had a talent for the woman's side in courtship. I had a strong, honest dread and dislike of entering the mysteries of the married state. As the time drew near, I lived in a perpetual chill of physical revolt. I knew maidenhood, its sweet severity, its innocent luxury, its radiant solitude. Such joys as marriage had to bestow were joys for which I had no craving. Irving never offended my most fastidious taste, but I preferred his far-off worship to the un-

thinkable intimacy which he so ardently desired. I used to recall with perplexity expressions I had read in Clarice's letters just before her wedding of her impatience for the day to come. For me, I looked forward to it as a prisoner to the day of execution. I was afraid I did not love Irving as I should, since other girls approached marriage with such different feelings. But I certainly found his devotion and worship indispensable, and I knew I could not trifle with a passion like his. Hence I made no outward protest and only strove to hide my dismay as the day hurried on by throwing myself gaily into the myriad details of preparation. It was a brilliant wedding, but my husband found a bride, affectionate, but stone-cold. Still we won our way fairly well through the ordeal of the honeymoon, Irving's delicacy of feeling, his rapture of admiration and homage reconciling me to my new condition. I believe my unspoken motto for the new life was: To be loved is terrible, but not to be loved would be much more terrible. This I am sure was not formulated or

defined, but was my very simple and sufficient philosophy.

We began our new home life in a small but charming house, an old house remodeled, in a fashionable location of C——, a half-hour's distance on the cars from Irving's office. My mother had been at work for many weeks there in preparation for our coming. She had despoiled her own house of its finest furniture, and even of its best pictures for our benefit. The old home was to be closed for an indefinite period, for my mother would go to England now to be with her sister, who was the wife of a prominent country gentleman and M. P. She desired the change greatly for her own sake, and she also held it particularly desirable for mine.

“A girl never stands upon her own powers and uses her real resources in her married life, if her mother and her mother's home are constantly at her disposal. I have given Sidney twenty-three years of unceasing care, sympathy, instruction, training. Now let her put the results to the touch and show herself a woman.

It is not fair for a mother at forty-five to live only in her child's life. She has still a life of her own to live. If I remain within easy reach and call I shall be an adjunct, an accessory of Sidney's establishment. That would be good for neither of us. We are two strongly individual women in the prime of our love of life and our capacity for enjoyment. It is best that for a time we shall strike out our own separate paths. By and by life will call us together again by its sorrows or its joys—its ebb or its flood of experience."

Something like this was my mother's manifesto when she left me, but life never called us together again. I never saw her after she left for England. She died after a short illness, in the Riviera, whither she had gone with my aunt, two years after my marriage.

She was a beautiful woman. I have recorded that before; a woman of exquisite refinement and of much poise and dignity. I think she was very slightly endowed with spiritual perception or genius. Both had been strong, I have learned

from others, in my father, but strangely tangled up with the esthetic and sensuous faculties which made him, while still young, a brilliant and successful artist.

I think what I have written sounds cold and thankless. I loved my mother more selflessly than I have ever loved any person, and I also admired her with enthusiasm. We were neither of us, I think, women of great emotional tenderness.

In a few months after our marriage Irving and I had already achieved a rather enviable social popularity. I think we were regarded as an altogether companionable pair of people by a somewhat exclusive and fashionable set of people in C——, mostly young lawyers and business men, with a university instructor or two and one already distinguished artist.

As the months passed our unpretending house, with its one servant and half a dozen rooms, became in some sort a social center for the people we knew. Our table was always beyond question in the immaculate character of

linen, silver and china, the freshness of its flowers, the nicety of the cooking. If we had been rich we should have had things in no better taste, no more essentially elegant. For this reason Irving always felt the way open to invite his friends to his home without warning, and a large amount of free, informal visiting resulted. There was much of bright and really good talk in our circle, clever, bold and daring sometimes. In this my husband participated but slightly. He was a silent man and while appreciative was neither witty nor original in thought himself. I became aware of this as I saw him with other men of the world. But the men who frequented the house all thought him a thoroughly fine fellow; praised his cigars, liked to sit by his fires, eat his dinners and talk with his wife. Plenty of women came too, but I made no intimate or confidential friends and the habitués of our house, as it happened, were men.

There was one friend of my husband's who never appeared at his table or fireside, in part because he had no time, but chiefly because he

was never invited. I had exacted a promise from Irving before our marriage that he would never invite Dr. Kirke to the house except in case of urgent professional need. I told him that I considered him unpardonably rude, and therefore not entitled to an entrée to our home on a social basis. Irving demurred seriously, but finally consented, doubtless perceiving that the doctor would have no more inclination to come than I had to receive him.

Without doubt our house, though small, was peculiarly artistic and effective. The rooms were low-ceiled, with heavy beams and wainscots in time-darkened oak, and in the hall a quaint staircase with a very fine stained window; there were odd bits of coloring, curious but quiet draperies, and some very good Oriental faience. The house had expression, people said, individuality, charm.

I kept my house with a passion for perfection, and as a reward received a perpetual cloud of incense rising before me from the groans and self-pityings of my married friends whose brass

and silver and plate-glass never shone like mine (they said); whose flowers were never so effective; whose floors never took the dark gleam of polish; whose rugs never possessed the same deep, dim richness, even though they cost much more.

My house was my stage, and I could not afford to have one of its properties neglected or ineffective. Each season brought its own fresh material. How well I remember that first spring when the earliest hyacinths appeared in the greenhouses. Their delicious perfume, with its undertouch of bitterness, always exerted a peculiar influence upon my sense. I had placed a great glass sphere of them, creamy white and pink, on a tabouret against the dark wainscot at the foot of the stairs; they were reflected in an old oval gilt-framed mirror with brass sconces, in which wax candles were burning. Having heard Irving's key in the door I hastened down to meet him. I wore a lusterless white gown with bright green ribbons at the waist, trailing down the skirt. My arms were bare to the

shoulder, but my gown high at the throat with a touch of green to accent the whiteness, and my hair piled high and bright on the very crown of my head.

What did it matter then, a voice in me cried in inward exultation, that I was not beautiful? I knew that I produced the effect of beauty. The dominion and the power of it were mine.

My husband, coming in just as I reached the lowest stair, spoke out in very ecstasy of artistic delight, crossed the hall to drop on his knee in joyous gallantry, kissed the hem of my gown and called me the Genius of Spring.

A simple, little homespun triumph, it may sound, but I knew it was less simple than it seemed. The homage in Irving's eyes was too often reflected in the eyes of other men for me to doubt it.

VIII

THOSE hyacinths were still in their place, so that it must have been the day following, that a great March storm of snow and wind shut me in all day to their company. Growing very tired of it by four o'clock, I determined to face the blast, have a quick walk down to the little suburban station and meet Irving, who was in the habit of coming by the four-thirty train. I started out cheerily in fur jacket and cap, but before I reached the station the wind fairly lifted me from my feet and threw me with stunning force into a snow-drift. I sprang up and turned about, forthwith giving up the attempt to reach the station. It was clear that no train would come through on time in such a storm. I struggled back to my own door breathless and panting. The house was dark already and darker to my snow-blinded eyes than it was in

reality. As I stamped the snow from my shoes and shook off my whitened jacket I caught sight of a narrow visiting-card lying on the bronze tray near the door—a gentleman's card. I bent to glance at it hastily but failed to distinguish the name, and in the same instant became aware that a tall man who seemed to have been seated in Irving's great chair by the library fireplace was rising and holding himself ready to meet me. The folding-doors opened wide into the library. I tossed my fur gloves off on the settle, shook the melting snowflakes from my hair and walked promptly forward into the library with my new-married air of graceful dignity and not-easily-to-be-ruffled composure.

The gentleman who bowed and then extended his hand with formal courtesy (not introducing himself by name as my glance at his card seemed to have rendered such introduction superfluous) I saw at once was singularly handsome. He apologized with winning deference for the liberty he had taken in appropriating a place at my fireside, unbidden. He had come to C——

in order to consult Mr. Lloyd on the matter of a small building enterprise he had in mind and being told by the maid that Mr. Lloyd was expected at any moment he had ventured to wait. As he spoke I watched his face with interest, for I felt at once that this might be a rather remarkable man. His manner was so extremely, even languidly, unassuming as to give color to the possibility that he was somebody in particular. He was noticeably blonde, with a pale, toneless skin, curly hair clipped very close to his head, a high forehead, narrow gray eyes with a keenly quizzical expression lurking somewhere in their corners, a small, neat nose, a firm-lipped ironical mouth, the chin round and well formed. He wore a fur-lined overcoat coming nearly to his heels, but I could see that he was a slender man with something still of youthful grace in line and limb. Only about thirty-five I fancied him to be. Although he looked no older than my husband he wore himself with a complete confidence, which was yet not assurance and which suggested greater maturity.

In another moment we were both seated by the fireplace. I had removed my fur cap and my unknown visitor was seriously engaged in building up the dying fire with sticks from the leather-covered wood-box which I had at once opened. I remarked politely on his skill in this performance, looking down when his head was turned away at my wet-edged skirt and soaked ankles.

He turned as the flames suddenly leaped out and then shot roaring up the chimney, and said, "You are chilled and your dress is damp, I am afraid. Pray do not let me detain you here. I am simply a customer, you see, a client-to-be, perhaps, of your husband. That is all. I have, unfortunately, no claim upon your presence or attention. And your bric-à-brac will be perfectly safe!"

We both smiled at the last words, but my smile, at least, was without mirth. He had infused into what he had said a curious suggestion of latent but habitual authority mingled with a restrained flattery. I could not decide

whether he was sarcastic or sincere. I glanced across at him, a glance of cold question. I sought some sign by which to determine whether to act promptly upon his lead or not. He met the look with an expression of sincere and courteous solicitude. I touched the electric-bell in the chimney-frame beside me and bade my maid, who appeared instantly, bring in tea and light the lamps.

“It is customary, I believe,” I said coldly, as the maid left the room, “for women to offer refreshment to their husbands’ clients.”

“It is good business, Mrs. Lloyd,” he said and smiled slightly—an indifference to the little manifest attention which I found irritating. It annoyed me that he knew and used my name while I remained in ignorance of his. Who was he, anyway? Was it worth while wasting time and tea on him? I would have given the hat I had just taken off, and it had been an expensive one, to have one more look at that card still lying on the tray, for to ask his name now seemed impossibly awkward. Just then he rose,

begging permission to lay aside his overcoat. The clock was striking five.

“I can wait half an hour for your husband to appear, if my presence is not too much of an intrusion.”

“By all means wait. I hope you will make yourself as comfortable as you can,” I said with remote civility. The office of ministering to my husband’s clients was new and not altogether pleasing to me. I took advantage of this chance to rise myself, murmuring that the maid had forgotten to light the hall.

As I stood by the bowl of hyacinths at the foot of the stairs, having lighted the candles in the mirror sconces, I looked keenly over at the card on the bronze tray. Yes, the light I thought would suffice for my purpose. As I re-passed the spot to take my place at the tea-table which Kitty was at the moment drawing up before the library fire, I could make one more attempt to catch the name of my perplexing visitor. At the first step I glanced, however, at the man himself. He had removed his great-

coat and was standing just within the open doorway by the piano, leaning slightly upon it, his arms folded across his breast, watching me steadily. His gaze was perfectly courteous and even expressed respectful, well-bred admiration, but that touch of irony about his mouth was more perceptible than hitherto, as if he had divined my intention and was amused by it. A curious tingling sensation ran through my nerves. I blushed like a schoolgirl as I hastened forward, my eyes fixed upon the tea-table. But my slight discomfiture vanished as soon as declared, lost in a dominant impression of this man's extraordinary grace of person and distinction of bearing now first fully revealed to me.

"Whoever you may be," I said to myself, as I took the chair he held for me at the tea-table, "you are plainly a client worth winning. I will play the game as well as I can with so many odds against me."

But the man whom I had uneasily felt to be in some sort my opponent now became my cor-

dial, even enthusiastic, ally, and made me feel for the moment that the odds were in my favor. The disadvantage of my plain walking-suit, heavy, wettish boots, reddened skin and wind-blown hair, of which I had until now been disagreeably conscious, were forgotten in short order. As I made the tea the very touch of the shining silver implements, of the beautiful cups, thin as bubbles, seemed to be my scepter given again into my hand. I was queen again of my own home and my court I found strangely to my mind, for Irving's possible client was now at pains to lay before me the impressions which our home had made upon him in the moments during which he had sat alone in the library.

"You and your husband have achieved here, Mrs. Lloyd," he said with fascinating impressiveness, "a harmony which I have hardly ever seen in such degree before. Seriously, I would advise Mr. Lloyd to give all his clients the entrée of his house. Nothing could be more convincing. I felt as I sat here as if I was in the temple

of an ideal home, to which every field of art, poetry, culture, nature, thought—life in fine, had brought their contribution, producing a perfect whole.”

“How very fine!” I cried delightedly, thinking it might easily be that he had never seen such a home as ours.

“I have observed,” he went on slowly, leaning back and enjoying the tea and thin bread and butter which I was myself finding delicious after my encounter with the storm, “I have observed that in religion your tastes—the tastes of Mr. Lloyd and yourself—are singularly broad. You are fond of saints and angels——”

“In art,” I murmured.

“In art,” he repeated, and smiled assent. “Catholic saints and Protestant champions impartially, pagan gods and goddesses, Buddha, Jesus, Socrates—all are represented. I have even dared to wonder which represented you.”

“We are eclectic in religion,” I said gaily. “I am assured that life is simply a succession of choices. Why not religion as well?”

He nodded, looking at me with grave sarcasm.

"That is very good. Religion is, we might say, carrying the notion of choice a little farther, elective as well as eclectic."

"Precisely," I said laughing. "I have not decided myself to elect it."

"You are a member, however, of Saint Christopher's Church in Boston, I believe."

How did he know this I wondered, growing more and more perplexed, but hiding my perplexity skilfully.

"Oh, to be sure," I replied; "but church membership and religion, they are two different things. By the way, have you heard the rector of Saint Christopher's, Mr. Owen, preach?"

"Yes, often. A very good man, and a very good friend of mine."

"Is he not very, very clever along esthetic lines?" I asked, trying harder than ever to thread my way inwardly to the man's identity.

"I regard him as authority in all matters of taste," and he was going on to say something

further but Kitty came in to announce that the closed sleigh he ordered was waiting to take the gentleman to the station, and, if he pleased, the driver said the horses would not stand, the storm being so very bad just at present.

We both rose. Without haste but without delay my nameless visitor took his leave, bowing over my hand with graceful but not too profuse thanks for my hospitality and the privilege of my presence in his period of waiting. He regretted my husband's absence, but he should see him surely at his office in Boston, etc., etc. I stood by the fire while he put on his overcoat and hat in the hall. The door opened and closed; I heard the sound of sleigh-bells muffled by the snow and retreating. He was certainly gone, clean gone past return, and yet I waited a full minute by the clock on the mantel before I stirred from the spot. I had an uncanny dread that he would in some impossible way be lingering still about the door and would again turn upon my impatience that steady ironical regard.

At the beat of the sixtieth second I crossed

to the card-tray in the hall and picked up the card. The name was Mr. G. Ross Kimball.

My visitor, my husband's possible client, accordingly was the great financier and railroad magnate. Then perhaps our fortunes were made, and perhaps they were lost. I trembled from head to foot. My first definite thought was to wonder if my heavy, snow-soaked shoes might possibly have escaped his notice. My first action was to step to the foot of the stairs and regard myself in the oval mirror. My second to seat myself in the chair which my visitor had occupied by my fireside, and seek to determine how my modest house really presented itself to the eyes of the great millionaire.

On the whole its cherished effects seemed to me less convincing at the moment than I had supposed. Had all those pleasing phrases he had used in its praise been satirical like his smile?

IX

It is not strange that I was startled to find that G. Ross Kimball had been my guest, all unknown, for an hour, for many reasons. He was by all means the most prominent figure in social and financial circles in our part of the world, at the time, and furthermore the center of various cherished schemes and dreams of Irving's and my own. We had, to tell the truth, joined Saint Christopher's Church in Boston because it had a wealthy constituency in part, and in part because Ross Kimball was an influential and active member. It was commonly said that he owned both the church and its rector, Mr. Owen, a man whose fixed distaste for experimental religion was counterbalanced by his very remarkable esthetic taste and culture. Mr. Owen, aristocratic by birth and breeding, in turn was known to act as guide and critic to

the great millionaire—a parvenu himself—in all matters of an esthetic character. For this reason Irving and I had for weeks past assiduously cultivated Mr. Owen, as our rector, sitting at his feet, so to say, in youthful humility. He had responded warmly to our attentions and had become a frequent guest at our house, and to me a very tiresome one. However, I did my cheerful best for him, the reasoning being clear and simple that Mr. Ross Kimball would be sure some time to build something and that the architect whom Mr. Owen might mention to him would stand an excellent chance of being chosen by him. If the architect succeeded in carrying the idea of the millionaire to a successful finish, his reputation would be made, his fortune assured.

This man, then, upon whom our thoughts and hopes had been peculiarly set, had spent an hour, almost, in free and familiar conversation with me in my own house, had even discussed Mr. Owen, our one connecting link, and yet his identity had not for an instant suggested itself

to me. At first thought I seemed to myself unconsciously stupid, but it really was not strange. I had, needless to say, never seen Ross Kimball, who was not a resident of C——; I had always heard him spoken of as a man of about fifty, and had formed a fixed image of him as a stout, pompous, red-faced parvenu. Moreover, a visit from the Pope would have seemed to my imagination as probable as a visit from this notable individual. I have never quite understood what led him that stormy evening to seek a personal interview with us in our house. Certainly nothing moved him again in the same direction.

He did, however, within a few days send to ask Irving to call upon him in his office in Boston and there laid before him the matter in hand. He wished him to make preliminary sketches for a model rural railroad depot, a series of which he contemplated building on a new section of line he was about to open.

Irving's plan, on which he worked persistently and often far into the night, was submitted to a committee appointed for the purpose,

early in June. A month later it was returned rejected, without explanation.

Irving's disappointment was very great and even depressing, but he took it man's fashion, as, after all, in the day's work, part of the fortunes of war, a thing which happened to every man and could be explained and softened in a dozen different ways, forgotten in a few weeks. To me it was another thing. I was intensely mortified, stung to the core, bitterly humiliated, hotly indignant. My indignation was professedly inspired by the railroad people, especially Ross Kimball, whom I denounced as the very embodiment of coldly malicious heartlessness, but in reality it was directed to my husband. Why had he not done a better thing—a brilliant thing? How could he have been so incredibly weak, dull, incapable, as to let this one chance for a future go by? What was the matter with his plan? In what had he so conspicuously failed?

For the first time I interested myself practically in the details of Irving's business. I

asked him to bring the rejected plan home to me. He brought it one July night and handed it to me, his face haggard and miserable. His misery secretly moved me to irritation rather than sympathy. I left the drawings untouched until he had taken the train the next day. Then I carried them to my own room and spread them out upon the bed.

For an hour or more I could not make my way beyond the minutiae of details with which I was unfamiliar, but these once mastered, the perception of the reason for the plan's rejection smote upon me with sickening distinctness.

Mr. Kimball had desired a new design, unique, original, bold, simple yet picturesque. Irving had planned a thing carefully elaborated, perfectly respectable, but destitute of imagination, almost timid and commonplace to a degree. The thing was perfectly suitable but perfectly conventional. Was this his masterpiece? I lifted my eyes to my dressing-table mirror opposite and was startled at the hard contempt which made my face rigid.

The subject was never alluded to again between us, but I can see, as I look back, that all the small differences and uncongenialities between Irving and me were accentuated from that time. I had suddenly become aware of his limitations and alarmed at his mediocrity. Success and distinction were vital elements in my scheme of life. A result of this disappointment was that I shortly after threw myself into the study of architecture, and although a fierce shame and scorn lay beneath my purpose, it was carried out practically and in dead seriousness. In a year I was a better artist in his profession than my husband. He was the better craftsman.

Meanwhile life did not go over-joyously for me. Irving had reached before our marriage a respectable position professionally, and we had fancied rapid advancement sure from that point on. But, on the contrary, at that point he stuck fast. Our income was far too small for our tastes and requirements, a condition which was intensified in a way after my mother's death. We put nearly all my inheritance from her

property into the purchase and enlargement of the house, which we had hired heretofore. The more elaborate establishment called for an increase in yearly expenditure beyond our actual resources, and a chronic friction and uneasiness ensued.

Under this condition my husband's peculiar natural caution gave rise to an almost morbid anxiety regarding every line of expenditure. He grew moody and despondent; he fretted over petty details in the economy of the household in a way which grated upon me indescribably as unmanly, small, even mean. The free-hearted hospitality of our earlier married life was shorn off as an extravagance and we lived, especially the year after my mother's death, in a narrow, monotonous and, to my thinking, sordid fashion. Always just below the surface, in my own mind, lay the brooding consciousness that it was Irving's incapacity which brought all this about. For this reason I resented, although silently, the yoke of petty domestic tyranny which he pressed down, often unmerci-

fully I thought, upon me. I also found his fits of despondency hard to bear patiently. I had reasons for low spirits myself, but I did not inflict my humors upon other people. Like most women I let my glooms escape with the first chance for release and gaiety. Men regard their dark moods, I have sometimes thought, as a sacred trust, to be consistently administered and not lightly interfered with. In spite of these disparities, however, Irving and I continued good comrades, loyal to each other's interests and affectionately courteous in the daily interchange of home life.

X

NEARLY three years passed before I spoke with Ross Kimball again. He always saluted me with ceremonious courtesy when we met at church, as sometimes happened, in going out or coming in. That was all.

Then there came a notable reception on New Year's eve at the — Club Rooms, given in honor of two eminent German scientists. Dr. Kirke had these celebrities largely upon his hands and he had pressed Irving into service to carry out their social entertainment, for which he felt himself poorly equipped, above all to act as master of ceremonies for the present function. As Irving spoke German fluently and the Frau Doctor and Frau Professor who had accompanied their husbands across the water spoke English not at all, he was essentially useful. I observed with quiet pride how

finely my husband carried himself and how well he looked—a dark, slender, refined man, still with a tinge of melancholy in his face and of reserve in his maner, but gracious, gentle and accomplished in social intercourse. I could still say that he never offended my taste. That he could disappoint my ambition and fall short of commanding my worship—that was something buried as far as might be below the surface of my heart and consciousness.

The beautiful rooms were thronged that night and one met all sorts of unexpected people, Boston's most weird, most exclusive, most eccentric, most fashionable. Ross Kimball's presence I noted promptly. Dr. Kirke himself was a rare guest in such places. I observed a certain lack of social facility in his anxious brow and abrupt movements. Still I was bound to admit to myself that he looked a noteworthy man, impressive, striking, even in the company of these savants, for the intellectual power and massive strength of his face and head. His figure was thick set and ungraceful, the shoul-

ders disproportionately broad. He was accompanied by his sister, Sarah Kirke, whom I had never seen before but of whom I had heard many things. The brother and sister, both unmarried, and both physicians, had a large old mansion in C——, with a beautiful garden. To this home they invited from time to time such of their patients as were peculiarly needy or forlorn and cared for them at their own expense; in short, they carried on a kind of private sanatorium on a benevolent basis with Sarah as interne and head nurse. This Dr. Kirke's practise, now chiefly that of consulting physician and surgeon, enabled them to do, as they had no taste for society and luxurious living.

I had had some little curiosity to meet Sarah Kirke, who was considered a very able woman and was a marked individuality in C——. She was older than her brother, decidedly clever looking I perceived, dressed peculiarly, something after the fashion of a Methodist deaconess out on a lark, I thought, and she

was so homely that beside her the Doctor looked absolutely handsome. With the same physiognomy, the firm, square nose, prominent brow, the long upper lip and irregular jaw, Miss Kirke's features were so much worse than her brother's as to give him marked advantage. Perhaps it was rather that the traits which in a woman were harsh in a man were powerful. And still there was a spiritual illumination in Sarah Kirke's face which gave it remarkable elevation and refinement.

I had been introduced to Miss Kirke: some one had brought us ices at the moment and we found seats together. The evening was half over. I took advantage of the opportunity to remove my long, black suede gloves. I always made short work of gloves, my hands and arms being perhaps my best points. I wore that night (a year had passed since my mother's death, I remember) a clinging black satin gown, as close-fitting, as lusterless and as fine of texture as the gloves I had just stripped off. The gown was sleeveless and low cut, quite off the shoulder,

and perfectly plain aside from the straps of dull jet holding the bodice in place.

Miss Kirke looked at me with a peculiarly meditative expression in her eyes which I have since found a characteristic of her. I could not decide whether she approved me and my costume or not. Probably not, all things considered.

"You are—do I understand?" she asked, "the wife of my brother's friend, Irving Lloyd?"

"Yes," I replied, smiling, with an effort to please if possible this very homely and imperative but very eminent woman, even if she was a Methodist.

"Strange," she said, "I had never heard that he was married."

I experienced a distinctly unpleasant sensation at these words. One prefers always to have one's existence admitted, even if unfavorable opinions of one's personality are probable. So Dr. Kirke had never mentioned me! That was a return for my ignoring of him which on

second thought I found rather to be admired. It was in good taste and not overdone. Probably it was the simple consequence of the fact that he had never thought of me a second time while I had been fighting hot battles in my heart with him whenever I remembered his chilling brusqueness at our first meeting. We had met only casually and at long intervals since then, and had never got on together.

Miss Kirke's remark gave me a disagreeable sensation, as I have said, but I replied with an innocent unconscious remark to the effect that we had in fact been married three years and that we had a little home of our own in C——, not very far from Miss Kirke's own beautiful residence.

"I have no doubt your house is very artistic," she said, still regarding me with that air of quiet, discriminating contemplation.

"Well, I think it is rather nice," I said ingenuously. "My husband naturally expresses his temperament and tastes, particularly in his immediate surroundings."

She interrupted me with a question as to the location of our house, as if my remark were something irrelevant. We talked on smoothly for a few minutes, until suddenly she asked with startling directness, "Mr. Lloyd is doing very well in his profession, is he not?"

To my relief at that moment I saw that Ross Kimball was obviously making his way in our direction. I began to have a certain dread of this particularly pointed method of Miss Kirke's conversation, although I believed that I should not dislike her. But Mr. Kimball was much more to the purpose on this occasion without doubt. He had glanced at me several times, I knew perfectly, during the evening, without fully recognizing me. He was looking younger and more brilliantly handsome than I had seen him before. Full dress suited him notably.

I replied with cordial, even enthusiastic assent to Miss Kirke's question, gave her a little terminating, apologetic word as I rose, set my sherbet glass on a table behind me, gathered my long gloves and black ostrich-feather fan in my

hand and turned just at the right moment to receive Ross Kimball with the proper little accent of surprise. He greeted me as if we were particularly good friends who had parted but a day before, remarking when we had shaken hands that gloves were of all eccentricities of the toilet the most inelegant, and quietly removing his own. He gave me his arm then and we walked on through the rooms and galleries in the direction of the ballroom, he bending his head at a most admirable angle to listen to my remarks, and tingeing all that he said himself with delicate implied compliment. Again, as on the evening when he came to my house, his presence sent a strange sensation like a mild electric current through all my nerves. He recalled with something almost approaching sentiment as we walked on, that stormy evening when he had sat with me by my fireside, at my tea-table, "so exquisitely appointed, and even more exquisitely served."

He said, laughingly, that a woman with my coloring ought always to be seen just coming in

from a furious storm unless it were possible to see her in evening dress. He made me know that he knew a fine woman when he saw her, and that I was at the moment marvelously to his taste. Still, his flattery was refined and forbearing and did not offend. Rather, it came with healing effect to the deep and always aching wound my pride had received in his rejection of Irving's work and in his failure to follow up in any wise the acquaintance with myself, an event which I had secretly but confidently anticipated. I had then, after all, made some slight impression.

We had approached the ballroom, without explicit purpose or intention, drawn by the general movement in that direction and by the very beautiful music; we now reached a broad landing from which half a dozen shallow steps, richly carpeted, led down to its wide-open doors. We paused then, looking into the brilliant, moving scene below. Behind us were several deep window-niches with cushioned seats. My companion led me to one of these. "See," he said,

“we can watch the dancing from here as well and at the same time not miss the chance I have so long wanted for a little conversation.”

I looked up to find his eyes resting upon my face, alight with a strange, cold ardor which confused me and yet gave me a sense of keen exultation.

“I want to talk with you about your husband’s work,” he began again. I grew cold at the words, and my heart sank with nameless pain. He was going to tell me wherein Irving had failed three years ago in those wretched depot plans; he was eager to justify himself at my husband’s expense. Not a difficult thing to do I knew perfectly, all the same he should learn that a wife does not discuss her husband’s failings with a stranger. I lifted my eyes and head with instant honest resistance, and met a fixed ironical scrutiny in Ross Kimball’s eyes.

“I hear,” he continued gently, “that Mr. Lloyd has been doing such extremely clever work lately.” With this my cheeks tingled and, I knew, flushed deeply. “I can not tell you now

in how many different ways it has come to me. That school building in R——, you know, and Mr. Sartorius's house are capital work, and they are bringing Mr. Lloyd very generally into notice, as you probably are aware."

I knew perfectly that he overstated the case, and yet my whole self, body and mind, thrilled with grateful surprise and a secret curious mingling of pain and pleasure in the knowledge that many features in the work he praised were my own, not Irving's. What would come next? Something in Ross Kimball's tone warned me that the climax was not yet reached in this notable interview.

"Yes, I am keeping an eye on your husband," he said after I had expressed my pleasure as well as I could; "possibly you have heard that I am building myself at N——."

I had indeed. All our world was discussing the fact of Ross Kimball's purchase of a magnificent site in the next suburb to our own and his erection of the usual American millionaire's palace. It had been one of my secret sores that

in this building scheme, in which a number of architects must be employed, Irving had, of course, no part or lot. Had he not already been weighed in the balances and found wanting?

I looked down bewildered, dazzled with the flaring up of flames from those old dead embers. How strange to sit so close to this man that my skirt brushed his foot, his breath my hair, to feel him near, kind, companionable, apparently on an equal footing, intimate almost, and to know that in his hands, in his will, Irving and I were lying like helpless clay which he could in some sense mold or mar as he chose. A shivering dread came over me and I grew dizzy. Just then my hand was taken in Ross Kimball's hand.

"Come," he said, rising, quite as if our conversation had been of a most indifferent sort, "Auf Wiedersehen is irresistible."

Resting on his arm I passed down the broad, softly carpeted steps as if I were in a dream, entered the ballroom with its surge of lights, sound, fragrance and color and in another mo-

ment we were moving together in the harmony of perfect rhythm and motion.

For a moment as his arm encircled my body, my bare arm in its whiteness resting upon his black sleeve, his eyes straying over my shoulders, I seemed to myself to have slipped my black satin sheath and to be whirling in some shameless, unthinkable Walpurgis-night revel. The hideous delusion passed swiftly, mysteriously, as it came. I saw again, in my partner, the courtly, correct man of the world, and in myself the stainless young wife, clothed with chastity in default of adequate raiment, as required by convention.

We danced again, and after that again and all the other dancers watched us. All that Ross Kimball did was of importance. When he took me back to the reception-room and there left me he said carelessly,

“And you must not forget to tell Mr. Lloyd that I hope he will interest himself in that new house of mine.”

“I will try not to forget!” I cried, flashing

back at him with joyous daring my perception that he knew perfectly the tremendous significance to us of such a word from him.

I stood alone for a moment, seeing Irving crossing to meet me. My heart pounded hard against my side, and all my blood seemed on fire; only my head was clear and cool. I felt intuitively that the situation held elements of danger, but the hope of swift achievement of name and power for my husband was high, and worth running risks for, since I firmly believed in myself. Yes, I dared to play the game.

The passion of love I had come to regard as a distemper which I might reasonably hope to escape, having escaped it, alas! thus far in my life.

XI

IRVING was retained as an architect on the Ross Kimball residence without further effort or ceremony.

The part assigned him in the building operations was the working out of the interior finish and decoration of the great west wing, which for various reasons had been thus far left unaccomplished. In this wing Mr. Kimball was to have a large and lofty music-room, approached through a suite of smaller apartments, while the wing was to terminate in a massive battlemented octagonal tower. The lower floor of this tower would consist entirely of the owner's private library, while the upper part, a smaller octagonal chamber over the library enclosed by a wide corridor, would be left unfinished. This tower room would be used, temporarily at least, as a storeroom for the re-

ception of cases of books, paintings and other importations which Mr. Kimball was continually receiving from Europe and the East. Mr. Owen was even then abroad, collecting for his friend.

Irving had nothing to consider, at least for the time, regarding the upper part of the tower. His attention was to be given exclusively to the library below, to the music-room and the suite of small rooms adjoining, their walls, windows, wainscots, floors, decorations, even their furnishing. His plans were all subject to the advice and approval of the chief architect, Mr. Hook. Upon him it became necessary, first of all, to make a satisfactory impression as to Irving's capacity to carry out so important an undertaking.

This time my husband did not work alone, and, hard as he worked, I worked harder yet. There must be no such word as fail. Together or separately we visited the show places of the country, north and south, and all the great importing and designing establishments. But this

was simply preliminary. The real work for me consisted in fairly steeping myself in primitive and classic art, in orientalism and medievalism, in the development of design and decoration, wood-carving, leather-working; in knowing stained and painted glass historically and technically, in mastering the whole range of symbolic ornament. Oh how I worked, and how I loved it! Never could work have been better suited to the worker. At last I seemed to find that which I was fitted to do. All my inheritance of artistic temperament had now free play. Then my imagination and fancy suddenly sprang into energy. From studying and amassing detail at one certain time I awoke to the perception that I could coordinate, could combine, could even create. I was sitting that June morning in the Public Library at a table heaped high with books. The intellectual passion of that moment of illumination I can never forget. Laden with books and papers I walked straight out of the library and down Boylston Street to Irving's office. I found him alone at his desk

bending laboriously over the ground plan of the Kimball house.

“Look here, Irving,” I cried, “I have something to show you, something to give you! Here is our keynote for the whole mural decoration of the west wing. It is a discovery. You will see I am right. We shall modify, and improve and correct, but the motif is here to be elaborated and it means success. Oh, Irving, I can not be mistaken!”

Then I sat down beside him at the desk and sketched out my notion rapidly but with a sure touch.

The work before us lay essentially in three divisions. First as one left the central part of the house came the two reception or conversation rooms, opening from a central hall; second, the music-room; and, approached from that by a vestibule, the great octagon library. In my conception we had here a logical sequence, perfectly simple and natural; first, speech, then music, lastly silence—the silence of brooding thought, the climax and the matrix also of both

the others. By another interpretation the gradation of thought might be described as the social gaiety of the Child, the poetic glory and rapture of the Youth, the intellectual power and mastery of the Mature Man. The beginning I would have oriental—vivid, brilliant, full of warmth and color. The music-room I would make pure Greek and fill it with esthetic joy and harmony. Its walls should show in painting, and also if possible in tapestry, the story of Orpheus; Apollo and Daphne; Euterpe, Terpsichore, Echo and Narcissus, singing dryads and piping fauns. The vestibule, by which the library was approached, should give the note of Greco-Egyptian art, as of Alexandria, in medallions of the Ptolemies, while figures of Pompey, Cleopatra, Cæsar and Mark Antony should suggest the Roman. The library itself should be pure Egyptian, massive, grave, profoundly intellectual in significance and symbol. Such was my thought in its first inception.

For an hour I met objections. Irving always saw these predominant in every unfa-

miliar thing. His mind moved slowly, cautiously, painfully even to its conclusions. My joyous, triumphant excitement cooled rapidly. I remained outwardly patient but inwardly I was consumed with weariness and disappointment. It was all perfectly reasonable, inevitable as I can see more clearly now. Irving had not been traveling the path by which I had dashed to my discovery: he was at this time absorbed in conscientiously mastering necessary details of material and measurement. He was not ready yet for this phase of the thing. It was premature. I had outrun his thought. He would try to meet me; but it must be done by gradual approach and careful process. His mind could not leap instantly to the perception of what I had done. But what I longed for then was somebody who could leap to that perception, somebody who could exult with me in the beauty and the satisfaction of the artistic instinct which I had found.

At the end of an hour Irving leaned back in his chair, and said with forbearing kindness,

"I can see that it might be really very good, Sidney. You are certainly the cleverest girl! How proud we shall be by-and-by when this is all worked out!"

I rose then, gathered up my papers and went to the office door. I felt my lips quiver and did not try to speak. Irving had already drawn his own plan back to position.

"Good-by, dearest," he said, not turning his head; "don't wait dinner for me to-night, I shall be very late."

I came slowly down three flights of stairs to avoid facing the elevator boy and to gain time to win back a street countenance. When I reached the street door I saw at once, across the narrow sidewalk, a shining trap, with a pair of blooded horses which I knew as Ross Kimball's. Mr. Kimball himself then suddenly appeared; I did not see from where he came. He held out his hand as if he had been watching for me and looked at me with a sudden change of expression.

"Good morning," he said quickly, hastening

on; then, "Come, I am sure you are tired or not well. You look quite out of spirits. You need a good breath of fresh air. I will take you out to C—— and safe home."

Without waiting for me either to decline or consent he immediately assisted me to a place in the trap, took the seat by my side and before I quite realized what had happened we were spinning away at a great pace over a smooth pavement. I found it vastly more stimulating than the transit I had anticipated in the electric car. Nothing was said until the bridge was crossed. At first I am sure I could not have spoken, for I had the big sob in my throat which a child has when some one has hurt it and some one else has been pitiful to it. Tears were near the brim.

"This is better," Ross Kimball said, at last. "You are getting back your color and begin to look like yourself. What are you doing in these days that you get so tired over? What makes you stay such long hours in the library and carry around with you loads of books which

ought to be borne behind you by a slave? Whatever it is I object to it!"

At this I laughed, nervously, consciously, at first, and then, catching the element of pure comedy in the situation, merrily and naturally. My face relaxed, I dashed off a tear or two unseen, and a strong reaction of spirit came upon me. In the bottom of my heart still lay the new sense of joy and power which the morning's experience had founded there. Irving might have no more perception of what I had done than that wooden Indian at the tobacconist's door we were just passing. But I knew I had done a good thing, and I exulted in the power to do it. And all unknown to him it was for this man beside me I had done it, this man with the subtle beauty of his face, the caressing irony in his eyes, the quiet command in his ways, the man who also had power and had won it himself! And he watched all my motions, it seemed, and was strangely acquainted with my ways. What did this signify? How long we drove I do not know. I think it was for hours. I knew that throughout

the time I was lifted altogether out of myself; all my perceptions seemed strangely quickened, I was bold in retort, witty in repartee, gay, audacious—yes, I was and I knew it, fascinating to my very finger-tips to the man beside me. I was willing to be. It was for Irving's interest that I should be, quite as much as for my own. There was need enough, I told myself with an involuntary curl of my lip, that one of us should wake up and do something.

We drove out to the new house and stopped before it for a few moments while Ross Kimball pointed out to me the general plan. In the central portion would be, besides the usual rooms, the great picture and organ gallery; in the east wing, he said, Mrs. Kimball would have her private suite of apartments. I had never heard him mention his wife before. She was seldom seen, little known; but said to be exclusive, well born and bred and an invalid. As we returned homeward we passed Dr. Kirke's residence and I bowed to Miss Kirke who was entering the gate at the time. Ross Kimball un-

covered and bent forward in respectful salutation.

"She must be very clever," I said, "and so very good."

"By Jove!" he cried, "she has got to be. When a woman is as homely as that all she can do to atone is to be both clever and good. A pretty woman need not be either unless she has a fancy for it. But when you find a woman who has all three—beauty, wit and goodness—and enchantment thrown in—" He broke off there.

"Yes, when you do," I said carelessly; "but that happens hardly ever I should think."

"Hardly ever, indeed," he said, then added under his breath, "but when it does, Heaven help a man!"

I knew his eyes were resting fully upon my face. To keep my own downcast was to look absurd and self-conscious. I glanced up carelessly. I was surprised at the look of profound gravity, of concentration, on his face. It was wholly destitute of flattery or complaisance. Usually in my presence Mr. Kimball's range of

expression, though varied, was, with rare exceptions, of a superficial, conventional order. The look I now saw I had never seen before. It impressed me, not as the look of the society man, but as that of the general, the great financier, the man who does things. There was power of some sort in it, power and mastery. The man was formidable, this I felt through and through.

A few days later I received a visit from Sarah Kirke, who had, it seemed, made up her mind, unlike her brother, that I was not to be ignored. I appreciated the honor shown me in this visit from a woman so eminent and so closely occupied. I found her one of those persons who grow attractive as one grows familiar with their characteristics. On this occasion her face seemed to me full of expressive energy and even of a sort of charm. She talked exceedingly well and everything she said showed a peculiar large-mindedness as well as kindliness. When she rose to leave she took my hand and said,

“You are very young and you have lost your mother. May I venture to say a word to

you which you are clever enough not to exaggerate or misunderstand?"

"Indeed," I replied, "I should be most grateful, Miss Kirke."

"Do not accept many favors or attentions from Mr. Ross Kimball. So far as I have ever heard or wish to hear he is as virtuous as Anthony the Eremite, and it may be as severely tempted, but he is a man of the world and enormously rich. This means that he expects to command what he desires. I read his face that night when I was beside you at the reception better than you could, perhaps. That is all," and she said good-by and left without waiting for me to explain or promise or proceed further with the subject.

I was sorry not to be able to tell her that whatever attention I received from the great financier was purely in my husband's interests, and, in fact, a business measure.

During the month which followed I drove frequently with Ross Kimball.

XII

It was not far into September, late one afternoon, that Dr. Kirke brought Irving home in his carriage, and told me that he must be put to bed and looked after.

"It is a very slight feverish attack," he explained, "a matter of a week at most I hope. I advise you to have a nurse, however."

It was arranged between us that he should send a nurse to the house during the evening and with that he hurried off.

"I am the lucky dog," said Irving, turning the piteous eyes of a man in a chill up to me, with a pale smile, "to have Kirke look after me when I have nothing the matter with me worth bothering an apothecary about. Short of appendicitis or a compound fracture I should never have dared invoke aid so august as his."

"How did it happen?" I asked, bending over to bathe his temples.

"He came upon me at Taylor's, and saw I was a little off and bore me home in his chariot. I know you can't stand him, Sidney, but do treat him decently for my sake. He's a mighty good friend to have, I tell you; never lets me pay him a cent, you know."

"I will be angelic to him if he will take care of you, love," I said, "you may be sure of that. You need me though, and rest, more than doctors and nurses. You are all tired out, Irving. How hard my poor boy has worked!"

"Just a little tired, Sidney," he murmured drowsily, and straightway fell asleep.

It was but two days before that Irving had submitted the first tentative sketches of a scheme for his part in the Ross Kimball residence to Mr. Hook for his consideration and criticism. We both felt that a keen crisis was on and the strain of suspense was great for both of us. Irving had in good time accepted cordially my general conception for the mural

decoration of the reception and music rooms and library and it had been sketched out and incorporated among the other drawings and specifications with the request that if tapestries were decided upon, Mr. Kingman Knox should at once be engaged to produce the suggested cartoons. I carefully avoided now all reference to these matters, but they were inevitably foremost in our thoughts, and I plainly saw as the days passed how much Irving's restlessness and general *malaise* were increased by this suspense.

The nurse, Miss Webster, proved to be a sensible, satisfactory young woman who relieved Irving's physical discomforts immensely with her strong, steady tending. Dr. Kirke came every day and stayed sometimes ten or fifteen minutes with Irving, always imparting to him fresh vigor as well as repose. I sometimes saw him myself, but oftener not. He gave his very simple directions to the nurse and had plainly no time or taste for chatter or for private discussion of his patient. The house door was al-

ways left ready for him to open without stopping to ring and he would often run upstairs, see Irving and be off again before I knew of his presence in the house. He had a singularly light and rapid step for a man so bulky and unelastic. His care of Irving gave me a sense of absolute rest and assurance, and I ceased to dislike him actively. He now seemed to me like some silent, but potent natural force which it was good to have on one's side—important, but to me, impersonal.

Nearly a week had passed thus when having heard Dr. Kirke go out unusually early in the morning I went to the library window and watched him as he entered his brougham with a quick word to the coachman and drove off. Irving was so much brighter that morning that I did not regret especially having no chance to ask the Doctor how he found him. Before I turned from the window I saw the postman coming and ran to the door to take the letters. I glanced over them with the feverish haste now habitual to me, for any word or sign to show

how our plans had been received. My eye at once caught a pale-blue envelope addressed in typewriting to Irving. I saw my fingers tremble as they tore the envelope open, for I had a sense that this must be the word that I was watching for. The letter was signed by a name unknown to me and consisted of but four lines, which said: Mr. G. Ross Kimball had instructed the writer (plainly his private treasurer or secretary) to remit the enclosed check to Mr. Lloyd as an initial fee for plans and drawings recently submitted to Mr. Hook.

My heart throbbed wildly with excitement. I longed for more than this cold, business statement, however. This might mean only that Mr. Kimball recognized that Irving had tried his best, but the best not being good enough he would pay him off and get rid of him as easily as possible. I went slowly into the library and sat down by the very scanty open fire; wood was too expensive to burn freely for my comfort alone at that early hour. Then it occurred to me to look at the check. To my incredulous

amazement it seemed to have been drawn to the amount of five thousand dollars. Of course it was one cipher too much, added accidentally! No, I found it again plainly written out; it was uniformly five thousand. "Great Heavens!" I cried aloud, "what a miracle! what a fortune! I believe I will put on another stick of wood to celebrate," for I was shaking, not with cold, but with excitement. This, then, was the way railroad kings did business!

I started to run up-stairs and tell Irving the wonderful news, but recalled the fact that the nurse was giving him his alcohol bath now, which must not be interrupted. I stood at the foot of the stairs, my brain whirling, letter and check crushed hard in my hand. I caught my reflection in the oval mirror and saw that my eyes were dancing with wonder and triumph, then scanned the wall beside the mirror with the sudden practical calculation that I could now afford to have that faded paper taken off, and perhaps even have the costly decoration I had so long desired in its place, and then—the door-bell rang.

I thrust the letter and check into my pocket, crossed the hall and opened the door. Ross Kimball himself stood there.

"Mr. Lloyd is better," he said, the good-mornings over; "I know that from your face. I have come to take you out for an hour. The morning is glorious, perfect summer still and you haven't been out, I'll venture to say, in a week. Come, don't stop for anything but your jacket and hat. I'll wait for you in the cart," and with the words he ran down the steps. There was nothing to do but obey him, and indeed no reason why I should not. Irving could not see me, were I at home, for an hour, and I longed to carry my excitement out into the air and see how the world looked to such a new-born capitalist as I felt myself.

The footman had held the reins while Mr. Kimball had stood at the door, I remembered, but when I went out to the cart he was no longer there. For the first time we were to have a solitary drive then. Had it all been planned—the reception of the check at this hour, and this

so soon to follow? I was beginning to learn that there were no accidents with Ross Kimball. Everything was the product of fine calculation and strategic forethought. But what did it matter? Irving was better; the morning was exquisite with luminous light and mist and the air filled with the sweet pungent smell of falling leaves; the superb horse, in his shining harness, was fairly quivering with spirit and life; the cart was the perfection of ease and fashionable elegance; the man who held the reins could manipulate world-wide interests no less easily, and in my pocket was my fortune, Irving's and mine, which I had helped to win. Great elements for my delight, taken altogether, and I drank the draught with a will and found it delicious. I vaguely hoped, however, that I might not meet any of Irving's friends or my own, and somewhere down out of sight within me was one fixed condition: I would drink the draught but never should it intoxicate.

"I can only drive for half an hour," I said.

"Very well," Mr. Kimball returned care-

lessly. "You look like some Greek goddess, Mrs. Lloyd, masquerading as a college boy, in that cap and coat."

"What has that to do with it? You are not in a logical vein this morning."

"No, why should I be? What is your vein, I should be pleased to ask? There is enough electricity about you this morning to illuminate all Boston."

"I am delirious," I said under my breath.

"And why?"

I was about to say—"You know," but I could not for some reason come so near the great event in words. I glanced up into his face and found his half-quizzical smile resting upon me like a caress. The blood rushed into my cheeks and stung them.

"I have reason to believe that I am the best pleased man in the State this morning," he said quietly, overriding the little access of consciousness between us in time, as he always knew how to do. "Mr. Hook has been showing me some plans and drawings and so forth for my west

wing which strike me, as they do him, as something singularly fine."

Then I looked up unabashed. Dr. Kirke's brougham passed us at the moment, but I was sure I did not care.

"Yes," said Mr. Kimball, with a nod and a little smile at my eager face, "I must ask you to congratulate Mr. Lloyd on his exceedingly clever work. Mr. Hook is enthusiastic, which is an event, as you know. More than that, he is positively envious, and will probably set to work how to undermine your husband's influence with me."

"How lovely!" and we both laughed.

"Yes, Hook says there is something more than ability in that work. There is a touch of genius extremely subtle and delicate—in the scheme of decoration for the walls for instance."

At that sudden tears of acute feeling pricked my eyes. There was a moment of silence.

"How much of it is your work?" Ross Kimball asked then coolly.

“ A little.”

“ Don’t lie about it, please. It is unnecessary. Do you think I can not see where plodding stops and flight begins? Do you think I fail to understand who my architect is? She suits me very well, for I have not often been able to employ genius; I have decided to retain her.”

At this I turned severe, although inwardly aflame, and began to delineate Irving’s especial excellencies in his profession. Mr. Kimball listened with great courtesy and this line of conversation lasted until we reached home. Just as he drew up before the house he said,

“ Mr. Knox has agreed to work out the four cartoons for the tapestries, those Greek subjects, at once. Hook will send them over to France to the tapestry works as soon as they are completed. We have cabled the order already.”

“ You mean for the panels—not the borders? ”

“ Yes, they will put their people right to

work on the borders from their own designs, and we hope to get the panels and all complete in the spring. It will be necessary for you to go over then with Mr. Lloyd and me and see about alterations and all that."

"For—me?" He was helping me out of the cart at the moment and my hand was in his as I spoke.

"Certainly. Please tell Mr. Lloyd that I wish he would, if possible, plan his work so as to get off in March for six or eight weeks. I shall need my architect over there, you can see for yourself—both of him! Good morning."

I flew up-stairs without pausing to take breath and listened a moment at Irving's door. To my joy the nurse was not there and he was lying on the sofa, partly dressed and looking quite himself.

I ran and knelt at his side, brought out his letter and check and placed them in his hand, watched while his eyes flashed across both, and then poured out all the praise which Ross Kimball had given the work save that peculiarly my

own—the trip to Paris in prospect and all my joy and exultation.

Irving sat up with sudden vigor, and responded with undisguised relief and gratification. For a moment we talked rapidly, eagerly, with vivid elation. Then suddenly his color changed to a bluish pallor, and he dropped back on his pillows gasping for breath.

I called the nurse and we used all the means at hand, but in spite of all he grew rigid, his lips and finger-tips turned purple and his eyes set. The nurse and I were both outwardly composed, but I could see that she was frightened and at the end of her resources.

“It is his heart,” she said in a low voice to me aside. I darted to the telephone in the hall, noting that it was nearly one o’clock—lunch hour. I might hope then to catch Dr. Kirke at home. He responded himself, and in five minutes, I am sure it was no more, he entered the room where we were still working over Irving in silent desperation.

I am sure I had never in my life been so glad

to see a human being. This man's presence meant more than comfort or hope—it meant life. Nobody spoke, but a few things were instantly done with a precision and a power which seemed to make all that had been done before clumsy and futile. In two minutes Irving's eyelids fluttered and the terrible hue of his lips showed a change. He moved his head, and evidently perceived the Doctor as he bent over him. In a paroxysm of tenderness I drew one poor, limp hand into my bosom and covered it with kisses and with tears.

After that everything went forward prosperously. In fifteen minutes the Doctor came down-stairs, where I was waiting for him. I was no longer careless as to his coming and going. His dictum was more vital to me than any other earthly thing. He strode through my little hall and had reached the door before I could intercept him. He stopped, the knob in his hand, glanced at me and dropped his head slightly forward—an attitude common to him.

“Tell me, Dr. Kirke,” I said urgently, my

voice trembling, "is it dangerous? Is it his heart? Oh, what is it?"

He looked at me as if slightly surprised.

"You have no occasion to be alarmed," he said briefly; "syncope is very common at the turn of fever. Perfect quiet is all that is necessary. Still—I wish your husband had a stronger heart."

Then he bowed and the house door closed upon him.

While waiting in the library I had deliberately made up my mind to explain to Dr. Kirke in a few telling words the circumstances which had led to my drive with Ross Kimball in the morning, since I felt that it needed explanation and I was confident that he had observed it. At this moment nothing could have seemed more irrelevant, more superfluous by reason of his absolute lack of interest in me, my actions or my purposes.

It was but a week after this that Irving was able to return to his office, and a winter of absorbing activity, rich in promise, opened before us.

XIII

THE following March we were in Paris, Irving and I, in company with Ross Kimball, who had with him besides his private secretary, a general utility man named Lit, a French Swiss who spoke three languages perfectly. He acted as courier, interpreter and confidential valet. In Paris, Mr. Owen, the Rector of St. Christopher's, had joined our party with his wife. They had been abroad for some months, traveling in the East as well as Europe, chiefly engaged in collecting rugs, pictures, bronzes and curios of many kinds for Mr. Kimball.

We had crossed on a French steamer, on which Irving and I received our first initiation into the life and habits of a "railroad king." This was the favorite newspaper epithet for Ross Kimball.

We enjoyed the attendance and luxury

which cost us nothing with almost childish relish, and again in Paris we found it not at all a slow or difficult process to become inured to magnificence. Mr. Kimball rented a very beautiful furnished villa near the Parc Monceau with full quota of servants and well-filled stables. The perfection of service, the unstinted but refined luxury, the exquisite taste of all the material details of living which surrounded us there, were to me a revelation, and our home life as I looked back upon it with its homely economies and cares seemed crude and bourgeois to a degree, as it was intended it should. That is, there were times when this was the case, and other times when I felt as if enervated by such boundless sense gratification, smothered by the lavishness of delight, and I would long for a tonic March blast of Boston weather, and a chance to tie an apron round my waist and go into my own little kitchen to "stir up a cake for supper."

But instead of such a chance I had a box at the Opera House every night, horses at my dis-

posal at every hour, art and music in glorious abundance and a chance to shop to my heart's content.

Mr. Kimball having taken care that no wish of the ladies of his party should be left ungratified, was seldom in our company through the day. Alone I never saw him. We met him at dinner, a ceremonious performance superbly rendered, and afterward he occasionally accompanied us to the opera. But it was distinctly evident that he had no mind to exact personal response or attention from any of us as compensation for his hospitality. He had many interviews and engagements with titled and official personages whom we met rarely or not at all. The provision for his house decoration, which now seemed to have sunk into a concern of minor importance, he left indeed largely to Mr. Owen and Irving. He was always gracious, unassuming, gratified at our enjoyment of the pleasures he put in our way, and yet at this time I found him more of the grand seigneur than ever before. He was less approachable than in

the easy, democratic conditions in which I had hitherto known him, more exclusive, more imposing, more imperative. I have seen since how infallibly this change added to his charm and to his power over my imagination. His person and presence and the taste which he displayed in his whole establishment were greatly admired in Paris, where he was called "Le milord Américain."

The last week in March was as warm as June in Paris and the charming sunken garden of our villa was already gay with spring flowers scattered in a profusion like Botticelli's Spring through the fresh and fragrant grass.

Mrs. Owen and I had remained in that Tuesday morning to receive the American mail, which was always heavy on that day, and now it had come and we had gone out on the terrace where deep wicker easy-chairs were placed. We were engrossed in our letters when Mr. Kimball himself came out from the house and took a chair beside the low table on whose gleaming damask cloth a servant had just

placed iced wine and browned almond wafers. We looked up and greeted him, unfeignedly surprised to see him at this hour. He had brought flowers to us both. Mine were hyacinths, which he had told me always stood for me in his fancy. Their fragrance had been, in my own house, the first token and prophecy to him of my personality. Mrs. Owen poured a glass of wine for him and as he sipped it slowly he said to her,

“That matter of Carlier—you know?”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Kimball,” she responded with peculiar *empressement* and significance, I thought.

“I think some one from there will call upon you this morning perhaps. Would you be at liberty? If not, they can come at another time.”

“Indeed I am at liberty,” she replied with an enthusiastic emphasis which indicated that the subject of their conversation aroused the liveliest interest.

Feeling myself outside the conversation entirely, knowing only that Carlier was the most fashionable of Paris modistes, I returned to my

letters and read on while they talked in somewhat lower voices. It was not long before a servant approached with a card on a tray for Mrs. Owen. She looked at it, and, throwing an expressive glance at Mr. Kimball, rose, swept him a courtesy with some grace of arch humility and went into the house. I watched her as she went, noting that the very way she carried herself indicated that something of peculiarly pleasing importance was on hand. I let my letters fall into my lap and held myself in my chair in an attitude of courteous but slightly formal attention, awaiting whatever my host might have to say to me. As I glanced up I found him watching me with the old ironical musing smile. It was long since I had seen it.

“Well,” he said abruptly, “I suppose you will want a gown too.”

“I do not understand, Mr. Kimball,” I replied with a shade of coldness.

“Oh then Mrs. Owen has not told you of my little scheme?”

I shook my head.

"It is simply that I have a fancy for having my house-warming next October signalized by two Carlier gowns. These to be kindly worn as a favor to me by the ladies who have contributed so much of their consideration and their taste to my home in many other ways."

I bit my lip, half in doubt whether I was elated or embarrassed.

"My rector's wife," Ross Kimball went on quietly, "has been so good as to allow me the pleasure of making her this little gift, which is abominably selfish, I admit, in its ulterior aim, and I trust my architect—my architect's wife—will be equally indulgent of my whim."

I leaned back in my chair with a luxurious little sigh.

"What can one say?" I murmured under my breath.

"Simply that you will make use of the *carte-blanche* to your *credit chez Carlier* and have yourself dressed for once to please me."

He looked at me as he said these words with a curiously cold authority which yet seemed to

cover a suddenly suppressed fire of passion. A tremor ran through my body under his look and tone.

“Do you wish me also to see this person then, who is calling upon Mrs. Owen?” I asked half timidly.

“To-morrow will do as well,” was the careless answer. “You might stay where you are now. It is the first time I have seen you since we left the steamer, and I only spoke to you three or four times, if I remember, on shipboard. Let’s go back to Boston.”

I laughed at his absurdity of overstatement, but he knew that I did not miss its significance. Something in his tone made me vaguely uneasy, but resistance or resentment had been forestalled by his long aloofness and apparent indifference. We talked on until interrupted by Mrs. Owen’s return.

A few days afterward I visited the Carrier establishment by appointment. Here, as always in Paris, I flatly refused to speak French, which I understood perfectly but used atro-

ciously, and an interpreter was called into requisition. I was surprised to find that some understanding regarding my projected gown had already been reached. Monsieur, that very very superb Americain, had given certain orders. He wished it of a fineness, oh bien extraordinaire, but simple, oh yes, yes, yes, quite of the jeune fille order tout à fait different from that robe-of-the-matron of Madame the friend of Mademoiselle.

I listened to the patter, not deigning to explain that I was also a matron—what odds did it make? I confessed myself surprised that directions had already been given without my knowledge, but was glad the gown was to be extremely simple. This being repeated to the modiste she gave the Frenchwoman's lift of brow and shoulder. The directions were nothing further than that Mademoiselle was to be perfectly suited. How would a very modest garniture of eglantine on the hem and corsage answer? So chaste, so elegant, above all so simple! While I expressed acquiescence through

the interpreter I heard the words spoken rapidly and low in French behind me,

“La favorite . . . de cet Milord Américain, qui était ici.”

I felt my color change but I did not turn my head. Two demure, respectful French girls in black silk gowns came forward. One of them carried a slip of white silk for me to try on. It would be fitted and form the foundation of the gown, which itself would not require fitting. It could not be completed under a month. Monsieur had said c'était 'égal. It would be sent quite safely and well packed in une très grande boîte to Boston direct, as would also the robe of Madame Owen.

All this explanation was given as I removed my dress. The slip was then put on and skilfully fastened, a running fire of low-voiced exclamation in French the while. What superb lines! A torso for a sculptor, n'est ce pas? It was not often one had the joy to work on such a figure. Then the corsage was swiftly cut in a curve around the shoulder line with scissors like

a lancet for sharpness. I stood before a cheval-glass. As the severed strip of silk rippled down to the carpet I exclaimed with a frown that Madame had made the neck quite too low. I had never worn a gown like that. The modiste noted my frown and with lifted head listened to the interpreter. She smiled indulgently and shook her head. I heard her murmur to her assistant in French, rapidly, under breath,

“With a bust divine which it were a crime to conceal, and yet a little prude!”

To the interpreter she said with dignity that the dress would be made to suit Mademoiselle in every particular. I knew perfectly that in this particular it would be made to suit Madame Carlier and the prevailing mode, and came away helpless and with some inner excitement.

The next day—our sojourn in Paris was drawing to a close—we all went to visit the tapestry manufactory and see the panels and borders which had been ordered there for the music-room in the west wing of Mr. Kimball’s new residence.

On our arrival at the factory we were received with marked and deferential courtesy and put in charge of a very intelligent and gentlemanly Frenchman. He first conducted us through a number of workrooms where we saw most admirable products of the low-warp looms, and several pieces for our own order still in process of making. At length we entered a large, empty apartment and an attendant was found in waiting, with several completed squares of tapestry on the table before him which he proceeded to throw over frames for us to view.

Here at last I was able to catch a foreshadowing of the practical embodiment of this part of my own initial conception. That conception had, to be sure, been passed through the crucibles of stronger and more skilful minds, refined, balanced, elaborated, strengthened—and yet the origin, the root of it all, was in my own rapt and eager thought. It was naturally with breathless interest that I followed the exhibition of the panel sequences for the music-room, marvels

of line and color, clear, light and limpid, or steeped in lustrous gold.

From a chest behind him, the attendant, near whom Mr. Kimball and I happened at the moment to be standing, presently drew into sight a cluster of squares, not less than six feet in size, lightly tacked together and wholly different from those thus far shown.

“*Ici est quelque chose très élégant,*” he began with a dramatic smile and gesture which called our attention to the series. “Monsieur has not ordered these, but purchased them outright. They were designed for royalty.” He threw the upper panel open, face outward. I caught a glimpse of a marvel of shining silken whiteness, shot here and there with rose, when, instantly, before I knew what I saw, the whole set was caught from the man’s hand, folded together and dashed down upon the table.

I looked around. The action, almost violent in its imperative swiftness, came from Ross Kimball, and with it the words in a quick, curt undertone, in imperfect French,

“What has that to do here? Obey orders, if you please.”

His face was slightly flushed and he gnawed his under lip for a minute ominously. Plainly he was furiously angry. The Frenchman began to make profuse and incoherent apologies which Mr. Kimball cut short by a peremptory word, asking him to finish the business for which we were there. Fairly trembling with terror, the fellow thrust the condemned tapestry hastily out of sight into the chest, and proceeded with the display of those which had gone before, his fluency and confidence markedly checked.

Half an hour later we came out of the factory, Irving and I together, talking eagerly of the tapestries and the delight of seeing such magnificent fulfilment of our own conceptions. I asked him if he had observed Mr. Kimball's strange interruption, his evident irritation. Yes, he too had been puzzled and surprised.

“The panels seem to have been for the house also. Do you not think so?” I asked.

“Why, evidently. At least I suppose so.”

"Did you catch a glimpse of the inner side?"

"No, not at all; I was looking at our own things until I heard Mr. Kimball speak in that unusual tone."

"Irving, they were the loveliest things I ever saw—that is, it seemed so to me in that one flash. White like a pearl in the sun—the ground you see, and this shower of soft pink blossoms! I was fairly aching to see more of them. Where do you suppose he is going to use them? Probably in Mrs. Kimball's apartments."

"I am sure I have no idea," my husband replied indifferently; "Mr. Kimball doesn't tell me all he means to do."

The following day, the first of April, Mr. Kimball left Paris for Mentone, taking Lit and the secretary with him and we saw him no more. He was to sail a few days later from Genoa. We remained in the Paris villa a little longer with Mr. and Mrs. Owen.

XIV

IRVING and I reached London, I remember, on May Day. The grim old walls were dashed with patches of color by the marvelous opulence of blossoms in all the parks and squares. The gold lace of the laburnum fretted the blue sky and the pink-tipped daisies dotted the green grass, and gorgeous toilets gleamed between the dark tree boles as the carriages rolled through the gardens. It was May in Mayfair.

We went to the gray Guildhall for a loan exhibition of paintings the second day. Leaving Irving after a time to undisturbed contemplation of Whistler's portrait of Carlyle, which chanced to be among the paintings and which hung in the large gallery, I moved on alone to the smaller room. I had left the catalogue in Irving's hand and had no particular objective,

but my eyes were speedily drawn to a canvas which magnetized me even from the distance by its sumptuous color and the startling splendor of its sole figure. Crossing quickly I saw before me the first original Rossetti my eyes had ever rested upon. Against a background consisting in part of a dense mass of roses, was seated a fair, large-limbed woman with pale golden hair, whose filaments were slowly drawn out and held upward by a comb in her right hand; the brow and eyes clear, haughty; the mouth sensuous, lovely yet cruel, the naked throat and shoulders magnificent, the pose voluptuous. The mystical, compelling enchantment of the thing the impression of genius displayed in a surpassing degree, almost took my breath, but left me troubled and perplexed. It was a study of "passion without love, and languor without satiety! energy without heart; beauty without tenderness." What did it signify? Who was this woman with her irresistible sinister witchery? A moment later I looked down at an inscription on the frame and read the name "Lilith" and below

the famous, though to me then unfamiliar, sonnet,

“ And still she sits, young while the earth is old,
And, subtly of herself contemplative,
Draws men to watch the bright web she can weave,
Till heart and body and life are in its hold.

The rose and poppy are her flowers; for where
Is he not found, O Lilith, whom shed scent
And soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare? ”

Slowly as I read and looked there struggled back to my recollection an hour in my girlhood when all unconsciously I had assumed a posture, an action, it might even have chanced, an expression, in some sort like that in the picture before me. For an instant I was transported to that July morning when my lover sat beside me with adoring eyes and I felt the warm sun filter through my hair.

“ Lilith! ”

That was the word once spoken by Dr. Kirke which had roused Irving and me from our love langour, our dreamy dalliance. How often I had sought to make articulate the sound

he had uttered. At last I knew what was in his thought, for I was told beyond doubt or question, by some mysterious inner witness, that I had here met myself. Vague hints of the old Dopplegänger legend strayed through my thought, and a chill ran over me. To meet one's self, did not that mean death?

Only for an instant did the strange delusion hold me. Promptly I rejected it. How could I fancy in myself the slightest similitude to the superb beauty, the imperial sensuousness of this creature, or to her cruel, unfathomable charm? I, the commonplace, home-bred American girl, Irving's wife, dressed now in my modish Paris tailor-gown and walking-hat, neither beautiful, brilliant, nor, at least I hoped, wicked. What an idiotic, distorted trick of imagination! Dr. Kirke was responsible for it and it altogether meant nothing but that when he saw me first I was drying my hair and happened to have a comb and a glass in my hand *à la mermaiden*. I turned and left the picture impatiently, but it drew me back again despite my will. An irre-

sistible pang warned me that, all the outward trappings to the contrary, I had met in this terribly beautiful conception one side of my own nature powerfully symbolized. I experienced a species of angry terror of the man who had divined something of the coldly amorous egotist in me at a glance. I went back into the large room, missing Irving on the way, and sat down before the Whistler to wait for him, a sudden aching weariness coming over me. He appeared after long waiting and asked if I were ready to go home. I rose, and as we moved toward the door, he paused, looking over his shoulder into the inner room.

"Did you see the Rossetti?" he asked. I nodded.

"Marvelous painting that, but rather monstrous, somehow. That man had a devil of an imagination. It is the oddest thing, though, Sidney, the Lady Lilith actually looks like you."

"Pleasing thought," I murmured and we came out into the old court of the Guildhall.

The next day we went out to Warwick. In

the strangers' book at the Castle Irving found inscribed but a week earlier the names of Dr. Kirke and his sister. He had not known of their coming abroad this summer; he wished we might have the luck to meet them. This, however, was unlikely. At Leamington we parted, Irving to make a tour of a number of the great English houses in Mr. Kimball's interests, I to visit my mother's sister in Herefordshire. Irving would sail in two weeks from Glasgow; I was to remain as long as I cared to do so.

I enjoyed my quiet summer in my aunt's beautiful country house in spite of two persistent drawbacks. The rain fell almost continually and for the first time in my life almost I was physically wretched, each day bringing me some small wearisome unexplained suffering. I refused the services of a physician and dragged around, languid, pallid and yet not really ill. Early in August I suddenly found that I was very tired of tea and tarts and all things English and decided to return to America on the first Cunard steamer on which I could find

accommodation. This proved to be the *Lucania*, sailing the twenty-seventh, and I was declared fortunate in being able to secure a small inside stateroom at a moderate price. I wrote Irving at once of my sailing date and made ready to depart. My aunt accompanied me to Liverpool, where we spent the night of the twenty-sixth at a hotel, parting there in the morning, as it was inconvenient for her to go to the steamer with me. In our last hour together my aunt spoke with unwonted tenderness of my mother.

“I wish she could have lived to see you as ‘the woman of thirty,’ Sidney. I think she never quite foresaw how fine a woman you would be when you fully matured. You have a noble physique, your lines are positively statuesque, and so is the pose of your head. You dress as only the American woman who goes to Paris ever can. Every one who has met you speaks to me of an irresistible fascination in your speech and manner. Men continually turn to look at you as you pass them on the street.

Certainly you have the indescribable something, and altogether you are a success, but I do not like to see you look so pale. I fancy, however, the voyage will bring back your color and appetite."

Soon after this she kissed me good-by, promising to come to America in a year or two for a long visit.

As I stepped on board the *Lucania* just before sailing time, my very correct leather bag in my hand, I was met by the usual rush of superattentive porters and cabin-boys, to one of whom I gave my bag and mentioned the number of my stateroom. We passed down the dark close corridor into the very depths of the ship, as it seemed to me, and when we came to the small, stuffy, artificially lighted stateroom which bore my number, 81, I was much surprised to find the floor covered with hold-alls and canvas-wrapped bundles of the unmistakable English variety.

Standing in the midst of these, adjusting a very obvious "fringe" before the mirror, I saw

a very dowdy and very dressy Englishwoman with high cheek-bones and false complexion. I stopped on the threshold, verified the number of the room, and then, speaking to the cabin-boy, but looking at the intruder, said with unconcealed displeasure that I had reserved the whole of this stateroom for myself. They had no right to put another lady in it. There must be a mistake. Quite unmoved the Englishwoman fancied that this might be true, but the mistake was certainly not on her part. The purser himself had given her her number. Decidedly nettled I told the boy to call the purser and produced my letter from the Cunard office assigning the whole of stateroom 81 to my exclusive use.

“Would you come this way, Miss?” the boy asked pleadingly, moving a few steps down the corridor. “The purser is that busy just at this time, you see, Miss, that he might keep you waiting.”

I followed the lad in some suppressed indignation, and at the foot of the stairs he caught the purser himself and gave him my grievance

in a few words. The man's face at once underwent a marked change of expression from that of impatient annoyance to one of recognition, of interest and even anxiety. He bowed to me with profound civility.

"Is this Mrs. Lloyd then?" he half inquired, half exclaimed. "Ah, now this is a mistake altogether! I had a lad set off to watch for you and make sure there was no trouble, but he has missed you after all and I am very sorry. You must pardon the trouble; it is all confusion you know, just now. It will be all right after this, Madam. You will have no more reason to complain. May I trouble you to follow me? You will find everything ready for you and I think you will be quite comfortable."

With this and a confident smile he sprang up the stairs, I following him to the next deck, my perplexity growing ever greater. Here he led me to a stateroom, which I saw at once from its location was one of the few cabins de luxe, and opening the door ushered me into a large, light room, its three portholes set wide to sun

and air. It contained a broad brass bed, arm-chairs and deeply cushioned sofa; a spacious private bath, immaculate in shining white tub and silver mounting opened beyond. Baskets of roses, fresh and fragrant, stood on desk and dressing-table; hampers of magnificent fruit and others of enticing shape marked "Buzzard, London," stood on the floor, as also a box of books whose titles caught my eye in the first moment. They were the newest, most desirable, most discussed of the season. What did it all mean? Less than thirty seconds had shown me these details.

"There is certainly a very great mistake here," I said emphatically, drawing back from the door. "This room is intended for some other person."

"Not at all, Mrs. Lloyd, not at all, Madam," replied the purser, rubbing his hands cheerfully, although evidently in desperate haste to get back to his duties. "It is all perfectly right as you will find. Every package there, Madam, is plainly addressed to yourself, as you will see,

and the letters you will find on the desk will no doubt explain it all."

"But why have I not been informed of the change?" I demanded, more disturbed as I grew less mystified.

"It was the wish of the party in Boston, Madam, who did the cabling, that you should not be told until you reached the steamer. I beg pardon if this is not just to your mind, but I have to obey orders, and the orders were straight. You can see for yourself," and placing a cablegram to the Cunard Company in my hand, he hurried away with profuse apologies.

I went into the stateroom then, perforce, and closed the door. The cablegram was signed by Ross Kimball's secretary. It ordered a cabin de luxe on steamer *Lucania* reserved for Mrs. Lloyd; she not to be informed of the change until sailing. I turned then to the desk and found two letters; one from Irving, the other from Ross Kimball. The former was a hasty, affectionate note expressing his gratification at Mr. Kimball's generous provision for my comfort,

and his joy at my speedy return; the latter was also short but demanded longer reading. I was to forgive the liberty he was taking in changing my quarters on the ship, but he simply could not have me traveling like a grocer's wife. He would not let them inform me of what he had done in advance lest my wicked, wilful pride should be up in arms and make him trouble. I must appreciate the fact that I had rendered him invaluable service and that I was traveling in his interest and behoof. The least he could do was to try to make my journey comfortable. Besides, he was in excessively good humor after having been given over to ill tempers ever since he left Paris. He was ready to offer me a king's ransom since I was really coming back to lift life out of such hopeless mediocrity as it had now assumed. The house was going on finely and I would be delighted when I saw it, which was not to be until the night of its opening for the reception. The date was fixed for October the second.

I rose, tossed both letters back upon the

desk and bent over the great pink roses which fairly covered it; they brought a faint reflection of the Rossetti to my mind. I then looked about me and took in deliberately the details of luxury and refined sense gratification with which Mr. Kimball had surrounded me. I liked them all and found them very good, most acceptable and welcome to the body of me; to the spirit? That was a different thing and I was far from sure. The danger of which I had had intuition when I met and talked with Ross Kimball at the Club reception last New Year's eve, seemed subtly closing in around me in all these finely drawn cords of care and claiming. How could I ever release myself? Where was it all to end? And yet the explanation of his letter was simple and sufficient. It ought to satisfy even the New England conscience. Sarah Kirke herself could not gainsay it. It was but the business method of the great capitalist who, as he said of himself, did not employ first-class service for second-class pay. Yes, I would accept, with simple, unconscious

gratitude, and enjoy it. Indeed, what else was to be done? Obviously nothing, as the steamer was full to the extreme limit of her capacity, and was even then swinging from her moorings. To ask my English friend in 81 to change cabins with me seemed the only alternative. This idea I found highly diverting and proceeded forthwith to appropriate the room, a faint sense of being myself appropriated being the sole drawback to my complete satisfaction.

When, a few moments later, I came out upon the deck, the first person I saw was Sarah Kirke in her long, deaconess-fashioned cloak and close bonnet, standing by the rail, looking gravely back at the receding shore.

XV

THE Kirkes, I found, had been in Germany through June and July. They came now from Scotland, where they had spent a fortnight in a very great house, that of a famous scientist, consorting freely with persons of high rank and distinction. They were, however, as unassuming as ever and no handsomer. About them there clung, as always, that flavor of a world wholly different from my own. Sarah Kirke at once opened the way for me to attach myself as closely as I cared, to their party. At her request her brother submissively obtained a seat for me next to theirs at the Captain's table, and our deck-chairs were placed side by side.

My occupancy of a cabin de luxe was never commented upon by them so far as I remember. Their staterooms were on the deck next below.

The Doctor was an accomplished traveler,

passionately, albeit quietly, fond of the sea, chivalrously devoted to his sister, unapproachable to other people, and to me as indifferent as I had always found him. In my own mind, however, I felt that a change was near. Before dinner that first day out I had reached the point of deliberately deciding to use the following six days, which seemed fairly mine, to break down this man's coldness. At the end of the voyage he should stand in a less unflattering attitude toward me, or we would frankly and finally declare war. His indifference had become intolerable to me. This decision was the outcome of several operating causes. First and most obvious of these, my pride was keenly stung; second, I wished to force Dr. Kirke mentally to take back that cruel name with which he had once characterized me; third, during Irving's illness I had come to regard him with reluctant reverence and with an unwilling admiration in which awe had some place, and which made him seem more worth my while to win than any man I knew who remained unwon; and last, there was

a very tangible if still uncertain cause for me to wish to commend myself at this time to his care and concern.

The question was, how to go about it? I knew perfectly well that the usual weapons of war would here be without effect. The second day out I made a blunder so bald that I never recall it without a sense of impatient mortification at my own banality. I felt extremely ill on rising, the headache, faintness and other discomforts from which I had suffered through the summer in England being increased by the motion of the ship, although not to the point of seasickness. Instead of remaining in my room, which was palpably the thing to do, I rang for the stewardess, and with her help dressed in a perfectly plain black velvet walking suit which I had acquired in Paris, and with a small black velvet toque pinned over my hair and my face as white as a sheet of paper, I came out on deck and turned in the direction of my deck-chair.

Dr. Kirke, it happened, was occupying his. Sarah was not in evidence. These facts I had

accumulated through my porthole before I decided to appear. The Doctor laid down his book, a small and shabby leather-bound volume and sprang up when he saw me coming supported by the stewardess, a support which I found actually necessary. Gravely and as if under orders he assisted me into my chair and folded my rug about my limbs and feet. The stewardess slipped a pillow behind my head and then slipped away herself to send me up some brandy and ice. I closed my eyes until I knew she was gone and the Doctor had resumed his chair; neither of us having thus far spoken a word. For a moment I felt that his eyes were upon my face, and I longed for second sight that I might discern of what elements his glance was composed. Probably it was two parts professional, one part perfunctory, a fourth part disappointment at the interruption I had caused.

Presently I opened my eyes and noted Dr. Kirke's hand, which lay along the arm of his deck-chair near my side. I had noticed when Irving was ill the characteristics of the Doctor's

hands. They were large rather than small, but finely formed, the texture of the skin as fine as a woman's; they were firm, yet sensitive, and possessed in a curious degree the expression of trained and tested power. Looking at this strong left hand lying so close to my own, which stretched pallid and nerveless on the rug before me, I felt a sick longing to have that hand of his take one of mine in its firm, invigorating clasp. A kind of wistful "Give me of thy strength, oh Fir-tree" appeal welled up within me. I glanced up then at the Doctor. He was reading, but he immediately lowered his book and said courteously, but in a colorless tone,

"You are not feeling quite yourself, this morning?"

In answer I volunteered in an undertone, "It is not seasickness, however. That would be simple. To tell the truth, Dr. Kirke, I am very far from well, I fear. I have been really ill much of the summer."

As I said this I noted anew how thin, wan and weak my hands looked as they lay on the

deep velvety pile of my rug. The change in them together with my desperate weakness suddenly touched me with a sense of pathos and self pity and I felt my eyes grow dim. I rather hoped Dr. Kirke would notice the fact, but, on the contrary, he sat with one finger still marking the place in his book, his eyes fixed steadily and musingly on a life-boat opposite.

“Why that is bad, very bad,” he said frowning a little. “A great pity, I am sure. I believe you are in fairly good health at home usually. are you not? Let me send the ship’s surgeon to you. He happens, oddly enough, to know something, I have been told—is not the regulation lay-figure, you know. Probably he can make you more comfortable.”

He had risen while speaking, and now moved away rapidly before I had time to reply.

Rejected as a patient promptly and completely, I saw myself, with keen mortification. Did this mean simply that Dr. Kirke did not care to talk shop when off on his vacation, or that for all and altogether he would none of me?

General practise, to be sure, was not in his present line, but after having made such exception of Irving I had fancied my footing secure. The ship's surgeon soon appearing I permitted him to give me a few harmless powders and then lay in my dizzy languor vainly hoping that Dr. Kirke would return and talk to me. In this encounter I had certainly been repulsed with loss.

The Doctor did not return, and I soon grew very tired of looking at the canvas-covered rail over which no speck of sea showed itself. The fresh wind invigorated me, and my head grew steadier. I wished I had brought out some book from my goodly store. Then I noticed the little book left by Dr. Kirke lying on his chair. It looked stupid; I picked it up, glanced at the title, and gave a small sigh of mock resignation as I read, "Aids to Reflection," and nearly a hundred years old at that. What could be worse? I turned the leaves, however, and glanced at a page here and there for sheer ennui.

My eye, catching the word "Ballroom"

printed with quaint capitalization, ran back a page to find the connection. The writer seemed to start with this sentence, which he called an "Aphorism":—

"There is small chance of Truth at the Goal where there is not a childlike Humility at the Starting-post."

That struck me as having two distinct merits: it was lucid and it was brief. I would read a little more.

"It would be a sorry proof of the Humility I am extolling, were I to ask for Angel's wings to overfly my own Human Nature. . . . It is enough if the 'lene clinamen,' the gentle Bias, be given by no interest that concerns myself other than as I am a Man, and included in the great family of Mankind. . . . Widely different from this social and truth-attracted Bias, different both in its nature and its effects, is the Interest connected with the desire of distinguishing yourself from other men, in order to be distinguished by them. *Hoc revera est inter te et veritatem*: this Interest does indeed

stand between thee and thy own Soul. . . . By your own act you have appointed the Many as your Judges and Appraisers: for the anxiety to be admired is a loveless passion, ever strongest with regard to those by whom we are least known and least cared for, loud on the Hustings,"—(What were the Hustings? Something, I believed, connected with foxes)—“gay in the Ballroom, mute and sullen at the family Fireside,”—Rather like Irving that, to be sure, at times.

“Applause and Preference are things of Barter.” What an ugly notion! I concluded to skip. Here I struck upon something marked with double pencil lines, concerning those who “prefer a philosophic Paganism to the morality of the Gospel.” That might interest me.

“Now it would conduce, methinks, to the Childlike Humility we have been discoursing of, if . . . Christians, restoring the word (Virtue) to its original import, viz.: Manhood or Manliness, used it exclusively to express the quality of Fortitude; Strength of Character in

relation to the resistance opposed by Nature and the irrational Passions to the Dictates of Reason; Energy of Will in preserving the Line of Rectitude tense and firm against the warping forces and treacheries of Temptation. Surely, it were far less unseemly to value ourselves on this moral Strength than on Strength of Body, or even Strength of Intellect. . . . What more is meant in this last paragraph, let the venerable Hooker say for me . . .”

“From the venerable Hooker I pray to be excused,” I commented to myself and was about to close the book and replace it where I had found it. A quotation from Seneca stood out noticeably alone on a page otherwise blank. I glanced at it as I dropped the book from my hand. The simple loftiness of the words has haunted me at times ever since that moment.

“This I say, Lucilius, a Holy Spirit abides within us, the observer of our evil, the guardian of our good. Just as he has been drawn by us, so he himself draws us. No one is a good man without God.”

Having now received all the Aids to Reflection which I seemed to require, and finding that no one sought me in my corner, except the wind, which was turning cold and shrewish, I next betook me to my stateroom and my bed, where in truth I properly belonged. I remained all day in bed, sleeping much of the time. Sarah Kirke came in to see me for a moment and showed kindly interest and concern. I was at pains to tell her that I needed no medicine whatever; without doubt the sea air would be just the tonic best suited to me. Naturally it took one a little time to become fitted to the change.

At five o'clock I awoke from a long and refreshing sleep and was astonished at the lateness of the hour. I slipped over to my sofa, drew a basket of fruit to the side of it, and then sat among its deep cushions in luxurious enjoyment of a great tawny peach as fragrant as it was delicious.

"A whole day lost," I meditated, "and only five more left for the siege of Dr. Kirke." Then I sat perfectly still and thought steadily

for ten minutes. As a conclusion I said to myself,

“Perhaps not entirely lost even yet,” and with that pressed the electric bell and ordered a demi-tasse of black coffee. When this had been taken I made a slow, careful toilet, putting on a quiet gown of dark silk, made high in the throat and of a girlish simplicity of outline and effect, but a gown which I knew to be peculiarly becoming. By the time dinner was announced I was a wholly different being from the pallid sufferer of the morning. Always I was at my best in the evening, and now I perceived with satisfaction that, although my skin was startlingly white, its tints were firm and warm and there was deep color in my lips and luster in my eyes.

I had come to a clear and definite perception that while the line on which I had heretofore approached Dr. Kirke, or sought to approach him, was absolutely hopeless, I had still at my disposal resources which might prove otherwise. I had treated him like other men as open to con-

viction by a woman on the personal side, if so be she was sufficiently pretty, clever or appealing. So long as I moved along this line he would remain invulnerable. For some reason he was not open to attack on this side. It remained to be seen whether he were equally inaccessible on other lines. If there was any field of thought or activity or research in which I was confident of my own mastery, in which I could hold my own fearlessly and on equal terms with him, I might yet interest him. To do more than this I had not the slightest desire, but this I wished more deeply than ever to do.

Hence I had been somewhat carefully taking a mental inventory at intervals all day. My college education gave me the broad general basis for intercourse with an intellectual and scientific man. My study of architecture and mastery of its history and details, a study known only to my husband and Ross Kimball, gave me a specialty in which I felt the power and ease of the thorough and enthusiastic student. I was ready to try one more experiment.

It was a little late when I took my place in the glittering dining saloon beside Sarah Kirke. The Doctor glanced up and greeted me with a certain toleration at least, I thought, and his sister pressed my hand affectionately, declaring I looked rested and made over. During dinner I asked her incidentally, if she had any taste for early English domestic architecture, especially for those curious, unspoiled old English manor-houses which one sometimes stumbles upon when well off the tourist's track.

She declared herself extremely fond of everything of the kind and in fact prided herself, she said, somewhat on her collection of prints of these subjects. I proceeded to give her some little description of an extremely quaint Elizabethan manor-house near Malvern, which I had visited with my aunt. I had had permission from the present owner to take as many views as I chose, and being enamored of the ceilings, staircases, oriel windows and the "bench ends" in the chapel, I had gathered a rather large harvest.

As I talked with an interest which I by no means assumed, showing almost unconsciously in my use of terms my familiarity with the architecture of the country and period, I saw that Dr. Kirke bent a little forward and listened with quickened interest. Before we rose from the table he had joined to some extent in the conversation. As we left the dining-room together he said,

“ You do not happen to have with you any of those views of the manor-house of which you were speaking, do you, Mrs. Lloyd? I should like extremely to see them.”

“ Why, yes, Dr. Kirke, some of them I am sure are in my steamer trunk. Would you care to look at them this evening? ”

Yes, both he and his sister cared greatly to see them as soon as might be. Accordingly when the tables had been cleared in the saloon I found them both awaiting my appearance with unmistakable eagerness, and as I advanced down the room, the views in a thin brown envelope in my hand, I saw that Dr. Kirke watched

my approach for the first time in his life with interest and, I felt also, with something like approval. I believed that the simplicity of the *ingénue* which he felt about me, due in part to my dress and partly to the very real timidity with which he and his sister inspired me, commended me to him in a way which fashion and elegance and self-confidence could never have done.

I sat down with them, the Doctor at the end of the table, and Sarah Kirke and I on each side, and passed on my photographs, which were of extraordinary beauty, with a few words of simple description and explanation. They were both delighted. Plainly they counted this an enviable achievement. The Doctor commented, with a keen question in his eyes, on my very unusual familiarity with architectural matters. To this I replied demurely that I thought most wives felt a peculiar interest in the details of their husband's profession. This remark I could see won me a higher place in Sarah Kirke's favor than I had ever reached before, and I observed the Doctor looking at me shortly

after with much the same musing expression with which he had regarded the life-boat in the morning.

It soon appeared, as one line led to another, that Dr. Kirke was an enthusiast and something of an amateur student in Tudor Gothic. A long and lively discussion of French and English Gothic in general ensued. I acquitted myself with boldness and confidence, sailing into his opinions without the smallest hesitation where I honestly differed with him, and once or twice convicting him of some minor inaccuracy in observation or statement with frankly mischievous triumph. He seemed to study me much as a lion might study a kitten, and I saw for the first time the peculiar brooding beauty in his eyes, which were hazel, and large and clear, but somewhat robbed of the effect of these qualities by the very heavy overhanging brows.

We were all amazed when Sarah Kirke, looking at her watch, declared it was after eleven o'clock, and she must send me straight to bed else I would be drooping again in the morning.

The Doctor seemed slightly reluctant to break up the conversation, but I rose promptly, bade them good night in a respectful fashion, speaking gratefully of their kindness in not being bored by my chatter, and so betook me to my cabin. The coffee and conversation kept me awake until far into the night. I decided then never again to allude to my ailments and never to appear on deck until eleven o'clock in the morning. By that time, I now ventured to believe, Dr. Kirke would be glad to see me coming and would lay aside his book without reluctance. This policy I carried out and considered my belief justified by the event.

The voyage was notably pleasant and in the short week the Kirkes and I became good friends and comrades. There was a strangely energizing influence, both intellectual and moral, in the association with them, unlike anything I had known before.

Often now, and always to my satisfaction, the Doctor would seek me out and walk and talk with me of his own accord. Plainly I was right.

An appeal to his intelligence, to his intellectual tastes, would win him to a serious, sincere sympathy. An appeal to him from the standpoint of sex and self did not touch him anywhere.

The morning of the day on which we landed in New York the Doctor came up as I stood on deck watching the approach of the pilot-boat. For a full minute he stood looking down upon me with an attentive but gentle and even earnest scrutiny, quite unlike any look he had ever before bestowed upon me.

"Well?" I said at length, lifting my chin slightly with my lips pressed together in a sort of playful defiance, which I had found he could do with very well on occasion.

"Your lips are too red, Mrs. Lloyd," he said quietly; "they are scarlet this morning, and they were yesterday."

I knew this was not compliment; could it actually be professional?

"Pardon me," he continued, and took my hand in his, then drew his flexible, trained finger-tips lightly across my forehead and cheek.

“Yes, it is as I thought. Your temperature must be half a degree below normal.” With this he put thumb and finger in his vest-pocket and drawing out a small pasteboard box, gave it into my hand.

“Take these powders, if you will,” he said, smiling slightly, possibly at the surprise in my face; “the directions are with them. I had them put up for you in the pharmacy down-stairs.”

I dropped my eyelids, fearing that my eyes would shoot their rays of exultation plainly to his sight. What could be more deadly commonplace than that neat diminutive yellow paper box? But it meant more to me than many a more romantic symbol could have done. It meant that I had won my siege.

XVI

Soon after my return Mrs. Owen came to see me. For a little while we talked over various Paris experiences, but she soon led up to the subject which I saw was uppermost in her mind,—the gowns from Carlier's. Hers had been received a week before and was a dream of perfection—in mauve. Had mine come? As far as I knew, nothing of the kind had been received at the house during my absence, and certainly not since my return. Mrs. Owen seemed greatly surprised, deeply concerned, was very much afraid even that it might not now arrive in time for the great event of October second. Should she not get Mr. Owen to speak to Mr. Kimball about it? Not for worlds, I replied emphatically. Beneath the nimble staccato of her sympathetic expressions I clearly detected the note of secret elation as she realized that her interests had

been followed up with so much greater care and promptness than had mine. I professed myself rather indifferent as to the arrival of the gown at this or any other time.

“You have no idea, really, what it is to be like?” she asked eagerly. “I had not, you know, either, but mine is far more beautiful than I expected, even of Carlier, and it really is very becoming. Mr. Owen is simply charmed. I do hope, my dear, that you are not to be disappointed. It some way seems so careless, does it not? I am surprised that Mr. Kimball should not have taken more pains. He might have looked after it a little himself, even, and then it would have been sure.”

“Oh, Mrs. Owen!” I replied, “I certainly should not expect that. He did quite enough in planning it in the first place. Mr. Kimball has a few things on his mind, you know, of a larger concern than an evening dress for the wife of one of his employees.”

Notwithstanding this very sensible statement of mine I was slightly piqued and disturbed

when up to the last days of September no allusion to the expected gown was made by Mr. Kimball, whom I saw two or three times, and no box from Carlier arrived. Evidently the whole thing had been lost sight of and it was then impossible to have a costume prepared suited to the very magnificent affair with which Mr. Kimball was to open his house. Mrs. Kimball would receive her own exclusive and select circle on Wednesday, the first day of October, in the afternoon.

The affair of Thursday night would be a magnificent fête and ball with music by several famous orchestras in the house and garden. The illuminations of both these were to be superb in the extreme, while the decoration of the house would employ the services of the best florists from New York as well as from Boston. This much I had learned from Irving and also in part from Mrs. Owen, who lightly let fall the fact that she was invited to both functions, the very exclusive one of Wednesday afternoon as well as the more general one of Thursday night.

It was not in an altogether unclouded mood that I set myself to work, five days before that long-anticipated Thursday night, to look over my two or three very simple evening dresses and decide which could be most advantageously freshened up and put in order for the great occasion. The choice lay between a pale green gauze which had an undeniably languid droop to its flounces, a thin white silk which I had never considered an unqualified success, and a simple but very pretty blue embroidered mull which I had bought outright at a bargain in Paris and had worn a number of times in England. It was still a charming gown, but its first freshness was gone and I tossed it rather sulkily over a chair-back and began seriously to consider regretting Mr. Kimball's grand ball since he had been so palpably negligent in forgetting me. The strongest argument against this was that I was wild to go, and as far as I could judge Mr. Kimball cared very little whether I came or not. Consequently my absence would punish no one particularly but myself.

I ate my solitary lunch in a very bad temper. The dining-room seemed low and dark to me; the treasured bits of ware on my buffet had a kind of doll-house shelf effect, cheap and childish; the simple fare—toast and a chop, with a cup of tea and fruit afterward, served by the cook herself at one end of the table—made me feel like a respectable seamstress or nurse. I had become so accustomed to grandeur and complexity!

As I rose from the table the maid was called to the front door and when I came into the hall I found her holding out in both arms an enormous foreign-looking pasteboard package.

“Has the man gone?” I asked quickly.

“Yes, ma’am,” was the reply. “Everything was paid, he said. Where shall I take it, ma’am?”

“Up-stairs,” I said carelessly. “Is it heavy? Shall I help you?”

“Oh, it’s as light as a feather, ma’am, to what it looks,” and with this she slowly mounted the stairs. By the time the package had been de-

posited on my bed I had no longer a ray of doubt as to its contents, and my low spirits had already given way to eager expectation. However, I concealed my eagerness until the maid was well out of the way; then with swift strokes I cut the numberless cords which had plainly been renewed in the Custom House, threw off the outer and inner covers, and drew out to sight my Carlier gown packed in folds of cotton and tissue with consummate skill. But the commonplace details of this kind were instantly forgotten when I saw the gown itself, for it was the most beautiful work of its kind which I had ever beheld.

I laughed low to myself remembering all the patter about extreme simplicity, a narrow band of embroidery, the *jeune fille* effect, and all the other—lies. The gown was of finest cream white crêpe, the front of the skirt and corsage, however, being composed largely of white satin of incredible fineness, embroidered by hand at intervals with pink sweetbrier roses and their leaves. The stamens were in gold thread topped

by seed-pearls. The shoulder-straps were of flexible enamel on gold, a design of tiny closely crowded rosebuds. In the folds of the gown I discovered a small box containing a band for the throat of the same design on the same flexible enamel joined by a gold clasp set with pearls. Upon this discovery I felt a hot flush run over my whole body and my heart beat very fast. I knew it was more than I ought to accept from any man for any consideration, and yet—. The whole costume was simple in its sumptuousness; it contained in a superlative degree indeed that irresistible charm of Parisian art, the exquisite restraint, the horror of the too much, in which I most delighted. The ornament was wholly in keeping. I removed my gown and stood with bare shoulders and arms in my delicate lace-trimmed corset-cover, and fastened the band around my throat. I saw that the effect was strangely beautiful. I saw that it became me marvelously. Then I said to myself, "I shall probably not wear that Thursday night, and afterward I can return it to Mr. Kimball,

and tell him that I never consented to receive more than the gown."

However, when Thursday night came I wore the band. I called Irving in to see me when I was dressed, without it, and then I put it on and said indifferently,

"Mr. Kimball sent this too, but I don't believe it is best to wear it. You wouldn't if you were in my place, would you?"

To which Irving, delighted with the finishing touch the ornament gave to my appearance, said,

"Why, wear it, of course, Sidney. It is bewitchingly pretty on you and it goes with the dress. What difference does it make that it happens not to be sewed on like the other trimming?"

The house and grounds when we reached them that night were more beautiful than any dream, more beautiful than anything but the magic which money can conjure up in these modern days. Hundreds of people were there, but it was all on so large a scale

that one could not realize it. No room was at any time crowded. Mrs. Kimball had appeared for a little time earlier, but had withdrawn before we arrived. Mrs. Owen with her husband was helping Mr. Kimball to receive in the picture-gallery, beyond the great entrance-hall. Her gown, I noted with a swift glance, was extremely rich and handsome, but mine, although apparently simpler, was in a different class. Her first unconscious look of startled surprise betrayed her perception of the fact. Instantly, however, she commanded an affectionate smile, but the smile, I noted, had an acid reaction. As I passed on she said with much empressement,

“My dear, you are superb! How glad I am that it came!”

Mr. Kimball's hand was extended, and he detained me for a moment, letting his eyes flatter me. A strange, half-triumphant smile hovered about his lips.

“Ah, how glad I am that your gown was received in time,” he said in an undertone. “As

you had said nothing I began to fear that there might have been a delay." For some reason as he made this remark the conviction flashed upon me that my gown had been in Boston as long as had Mrs. Owen's. I was beginning to learn a certain balanced rhythm of calculation in all that proceeded from this man.

"Thank you, no," I said composedly. "It reached me in ample time—in perfect condition. I must wait till another time to thank you, Mr. Kimball."

"Thank me at your peril!" he said, with a warning shake of the head. "I have had my reward."

I passed on filled with a bewildering sense that I had after all compromised myself far beyond anything I had imagined in accepting and in wearing these gifts. Mrs. Owen's look alone had given me a measure of their value. I was convinced now that the delay had been a very delicate bit of diplomacy on Ross Kimball's part. With what admirable docility I had played the rôle and run through the gamut of

emotions assigned to me! Fearing revolt if I had much time for sober thought, he had starved me with disappointment and then dazzled me with splendor until I was tractable!

“Come, Sidney,” said Irving, breaking into my hot and passionate reverie. “We must go now where glory waits us. I can not wait any longer to show you the west wing.”

In another ten minutes every disagreeable reflection was lost and forgotten in the unparalleled delight of seeing my own conceptions realized in complete and splendid maturity, my seed-thought full blossoming now under the skilled and fostering hands of masters of their craft.

In entering the west wing we passed first through the wide central hall, from which, on either side opened with a large arch a conversation or reception room. The hall gave direct access at its farther end to the enormous music-room. From the music-room a vaulted, mosaic-paved vestibule not more than fifteen feet square, lined with yellow Sienna marble, led to the entrance of the great octagonal library.

The first step, as we advanced into this part of the building, brought us, as I had intended, into an environment of Oriental gorgeousness. The reception-rooms first entered, comparatively small in dimensions, were, on the right, Persian, on the left Moorish. Walls, ceilings, floors, furnishings gave in rich, unbroken harmony the Oriental genius, vivid, subtle, mystical. Here was the half-barbaric riot of strong, unshaded color, thick crusted with gold; the infinite intricacies of interlacing line in arabesque; the mysterious, baffling patience of detail; the grotesque, bizarre symbolism.

This, in my thought, was the place for Speech, and in human development stood for the Child. I saw it and was satisfied. Here was the stage and scenic basis for the daily intercourse of life—for conversation, for sunny reverie, also, and warm, secluded repose. The sole flowers which had been placed here were poppies, which were everywhere in great bowls of chased brass.

We passed on into the lofty harmony of the

music-room, and here I could not control my frank delight. This was pure Greek and the ensemble of proportion, line, column, color, smote upon my sense like noble music, although the place was still. The acanthus and the anthemion gave the keynote to the decoration in frieze and meander; the latter with its firm yet flowing and graceful curves of flute and trumpet-like suggestion. All the color here was pure and lucid, of pastel clearness and transparency. It seemed to me the French tapestry weavers and the American mural painters had done their work in perfection, as had all the other artists and craftsmen. Everywhere, in panel, molding, ornament, and ceiling, was the delicate, graceful sensuousness of the Greek and his blithe and buoyant joy in existence. Between the great windows of the north wall was painted the voyage of the Argonauts, with the Sirens, and Orpheus discoursing his "diviner music." Opposite, on the south wall, was the Spirit of Music, an exquisite figure surrounded by youths and maidens, dancing in a flowery, sunlit

meadow. The four panels of tapestry represented Apollo and Daphne, Orpheus and Eurydice, Echo and Narcissus and Butes and Aphrodite. The coloring was of surpassing brilliancy and purity. Throughout the room fresh honeysuckles and orange-blossoms were scattered in profusion.

To my thought this room typified Youth—the youth of the race, its poetry and romance. I looked and was satisfied.

We went on between the yellow marble walls of the vestibule and stood to study the entablature of the library portal, a facsimile of the doorway to the Temple at Philæ, with the symbolic globe and asps, giving the incomparably imposing effect of its wide, overshadowing wings.

Just within the portal stood two bronzes, copies of antiques, one on either hand. On the right, Horus with the Lotus Flower, the God of Silence and the nascent Sun, his finger on his lips; on the left, the impressive Scribe, of the Louvre. Facing us across the diameter of the

room was the colossal chimneypiece, a propylon of polished red Numidian marble, carved with hieroglyphics. In the space above it was a painting of the great Sphinx of Thebes with the motto below :

“ Who telleth one of my secrets
Is master of all that I am.”

The remaining six sides of the octagon were filled with book-shelves, divided by richly carved pillars of red mahogany, their capitals bearing the lotus, the bell-shaped papyrus bud, or the palm. Six feet above the floor the windows were placed, and above them ran a light gallery giving access to the second tier of books. Just below the massive rafters of the roof in a fine frieze appeared the birds of Egypt, the sacred ibis, the heron and the crane. The ceiling showed an astronomical chart, the constellations gold, on a deep blue ground, surrounded by the zodiac. The coloring was grave, powerful, deep-toned.

To my thought the genius of Egypt, hoary, silent, with its severe, rigid dignity, its intellec-

tual mastery, its massive mystery, its profound symbolism, signified the mature Man. I saw and was satisfied. Everywhere here, I noticed, in open jars were exotic water-lilies, white and blue and rose.

Mr. Hook joined us in the library and we spent an hour together discussing the success of these decorations. The master-architect was emphatic in his approval of Irving's work and in spite of my protesting glance Irving there-upon explained to him the part which I had had in his designs. Upon this Mr. Hook bestowed upon me, albeit in a few words, a serious intellectual homage which I felt to be one of the climaxes of life as I had thus far lived it. As we slowly moved back to the central portion of the house and up the staircase to the ballroom whither all were now gravitating, I seemed to walk on air, and to be borne along by the buoyancy of my exultation, the honest, if intoxicating, pleasure of artistic achievement. Different mirrors as we passed them gave me back a reflection of myself which seemed to me a miracle.

I did not know that I could look as I looked then in the lustrous loveliness of that gown, and with my face transfigured by the stimulus of personal triumph. Men and women who saw me fell in love with me for the moment, and I fell in love with myself. Dancing was welcome to me as an expression of the buoyant delight which filled me, body and mind.

Ross Kimball came himself and claimed me for one dance and I forgave him all that I had been heaping up against him of doubt and mistrust. Let all that go for to-night! Surely never was there a more generous friend and benefactor. Why should I smirch the beauty of his kindness by mean suspicion? Our dance over, he brought me a glass of champagne and stood over me while I drank it, saying that I looked white. Then, declaring that he had been on host's duty long enough, he led me on through an open window into the garden, past the great southern porte-cochère and so along a dusky, fragrant terrace beneath the central pile of the house and half the west wing. Opposite the

music-room windows we paused. They were opened to the floor, and light streamed out through them.

"Let us go in a moment," he said, "I have not yet had the pleasure of seeing your work, with you. Don't you think that is a privilege mine by right?"

I acquiesced, with a faint flutter of misgiving at my heart below the keen gratification I always found in each new sign of this man's imperious devotion to myself. Something in his tone reminded me of the morning on the terrace in Paris, when he had spoken to me of the Carlier gown. Again the sense of being wound closer and closer in an inextricable net came over me, but for an instant only. The wild reckless thrill of the music to which we had been dancing still ran in my blood and the wine added its incitement to my exuberant self-confidence. The net must surely be of rose mesh if net there were.

We found the music-room deserted, upon which I felt a change in Mr. Kimball's manner.

He praised the work in which I had had part most cordially and yet he grew graver, and his courteous attention a shade colder, I thought, as we crossed from side to side of the beautiful room discussing its effects and what was yet left to desire. After a few moments I moved on through the vestibule to the Egyptian doorway. I stood for a moment, glancing back, across the width of the music-room. From where I stood I could even catch a glimpse in the background of a portion of the magnificent color and splendid hieroglyphics of the Moorish room. I glanced beyond me then into the deep library and back again. Something in my face caught Mr. Kimball's attention. He stood in front of a heavy Alexandrian hanging before a door in the vestibule side wall.

"What is it?" he asked smiling.

"Nothing particularly. I was simply taking it in, that is all. It is pagan, is it not? completely. There is the Saracen, a barbarous sensualist after all, when you have seen the Greek,—and the Greek himself, and then, here, old

Egypt, the worst pagan of the lot! I never thought of it before. You might imagine it was done before—anything happened, you know, ‘down in Judee,’ as Hosea Biglow says. And there is not a modern touch anywhere, Mr. Kimball! Do you mind?”

“Not as long as I have the modern touch right here,” and he laid his hand lightly on my arm. “You are sufficiently modern to atone for all the antiquity of the rest. I confess it may be a little dreary when you are out of it.”

He turned now, pushed away the curtain, and unlocked the door which it had concealed. This door opened into a narrow passage from which his private staircase gave the only access to the second floor of the octagon tower. The key to this door Mr. Kimball had always kept himself, as he wished one place, he said, where he could keep certain of his possessions in absolute privacy. This portion of the tower had not as yet been finished off, however. This at least was what Irving and I had supposed.

“I have another modern touch up-stairs

also," he said in an incidental careless tone. "Come, I want to show you a picture I have just received from Paris. You have not been up-stairs yet, perhaps?"

"Why no," I replied gaily, "I didn't know the upper part of the tower was open to visitors. I thought it was hopelessly private, and hopelessly unfinished."

"You can go up all right," he said in the same negligent manner.

I entered the small passage, which was lighted only from above. Except for a narrow grade door opposite the one by which we had entered, which must, I saw, open directly on the terrace, the walls were unbroken.

"Shall I precede?" Mr. Kimball had closed the door behind us. He bowed with ceremonious courtesy and passed me, leading the way up. The long metal staircase was narrow and interrupted by several landings protected by a wrought-iron rail. It was brightly lighted from above.

"The enormous height of the library neces-

sitates a pretty stiff flight of stairs here," said my host as we reached the top, and he preceded me down a spacious corridor, next the wall. I now perceived within the octagonal wall of the tower, above the library, the smaller octagon which had been constructed, precisely following the lines of the one below, but with a diameter not more than half as great, leaving a corridor around its whole circumference.

XVII

MR. KIMBALL now opened a door into this enclosed chamber and I entered, commenting upon my interest in first observing at the moment the precise construction of this part of the tower, and my curiosity regarding the new picture.

“Did you say it came from Paris?”

“Yes.”

The room as I stepped into it was very dimly lighted, but as Mr. Kimball followed me in, closing the door behind him, soft lights sprang up everywhere around and before me, and especially over my head. I looked up and saw that myriads of electric lights were shining down through the horizontal windows of richly jeweled glass, diffusing a soft glowing radiance. There were no other windows.

I stood spellbound. The intoxicating bitter-

sweet perfume of hyacinths filled the room. Bowls of them, cream-white and pink, stood on stands and tables; and roses were present also in profusion; these flowers only were in the room I observed. Just opposite I saw, slowly approaching me, the figure of a stately fair-haired woman with delicate color in her cheeks and shining eyes, clothed in gleaming white, shot here and there with roses. The figure was my own. That section of the wall was mirror. On either hand were creamy white panels, four in number, of richest tapestry bearing wild roses, dropped singly or falling in graceful flowing garlands from the hands of floating nymphs. I recognized these panels at once, and recalled the mysterious incident in the tapestry works. Behind me, I perceived, the large panel in which the entrance-door was set was also mirror.

The floor was covered with a white rug, showing roses in the border. The room was exquisitely furnished, but with quiet, unpretentious effect, the broad sofas and chairs being

covered in chintz, white, with wild roses running over.

Books and magazines were everywhere. On an easel stood a pastel portrait study by Boldini which I had seen in Paris. Mr. Kimball had always insisted that it reminded him of me in pose and coloring.

The ensemble of the room was of an enchanting loveliness with a singular effect of engaging, homelike, *traulichkeit*, skilfully achieved. There was even a sewing-table with a little low rocking-chair beside it.

“What a darling place!” I cried.

Mr. Kimball stood before me.

“Does it please you?” he asked with his peculiar smile. “It has been prepared for a darling woman.” So speaking he gave me a chair. My limbs trembled so that I was forced to sink into it to conceal my rising agitation. Even as I did so I perceived that it was a chair which I had always fancied for myself at the Monceau villa, or a precise facsimile of it.

“Those are the first roses I have seen to-

night," I said hastily, seeking to conceal my throbbing dread.

"Yes. Roses were set apart for you to-night. The hyacinths too, of course. The white hyacinth *is* you."

"It is all perfectly lovely, Mr. Kimball," I said cordially, though with inward constraint.

"I wished to make it so," he returned quite simply, and then with a sudden unforeseen movement he caught my hand and pressed it to his lips. "This room is for you and for you alone. Here are the keys. One for this door, one for the door below. No one on this side of the ocean has seen it—in its present guise. Oh, Lit, to be sure, but that is nothing. He has to take care of it."

I stared at him uncomprehending.

"French workmen have done it all while you were abroad," and he made a sweeping gesture of his right hand around him. "They have gone back now. It is our secret—yours and mine."

Then followed words of concentrated pas-

sion, charged with the mastery of this man's almost preternatural insight into the workings of my mind. He stood before me armed with his power of awakening that strange nerve-thrill in me; his remarkable personal beauty and his singular charm. Added to this was the full weight of material obligation laid upon me by his generosity, of moral obligation by reason of my acceptance of it.

I knew now to what all that had gone before had led. The net had tightened about me now to the finish, but its rose mesh was indescribably enthralling. A strange subtle suggestion flashed through my mind at that instant. Did not the great Sun-god of Egypt joy to visit Isis whom he loved in a secret room of the ancient temple of Philæ? I had myself planned the building of the famous Philæ portal below. Was it destined to be the portal to things far beyond my dream, my desire or my venture? What was it which was coming to me? Highest honor or deepest shame? I felt my thought becoming confused. My womanhood was insulted

indeed, but surely never was insult more splendid. I had played with fire too long, and now the flames seemed visibly to enswathe me. I was growing faint, and as the faintness crept over me I recall a cold, neutral sense as of estimating judiciously the probabilities of the working of this coup d'état upon my mind. I knew the Lilith side of my nature. Others saw it. When I should be going down from this mysterious room presently, would those keys be in my possession, would Ross Kimball hold the promise which he sought—the promise of my return? My head dropped and my eyes closed. I felt the hand which fell helpless at my side caught in his hand. The touch startled me as if it had been fire. Oh, fool, to faint now! a voice cried within in self-scorn. With a mighty effort I rose, stepped back a pace, and resting my arms on the frame of the chair I lifted my head and confronted Ross Kimball in a passion of horror and loathing. For there had flashed upon me in that instant the hateful sense that I was to be bought, bought with a poor, paltry

show of material magnificence, bought with the greed of luxury, bought with the fear of falling fortune for my husband, with the dread of disgrace for myself, tricked into a glittering trap for lust's sake, not swept down by a strong man's honest, overwhelming love.

Doubtless to the man before me the price offered for a woman's soul seemed on the whole extravagantly high. But it was not high enough. He asked the supreme sacrifice of a woman's purity, faith, honor, her happiness on earth, her hope of heaven, the most precious of spiritual essences,—and for this he was ready to barter certain material commodities, as gold, silver, and precious stones. It was as if he had said, A true man's heart I have not, but silver and gold (such as I have) give I thee. Could he have reversed the words I should have trembled indeed before him.

I think perhaps, though it might be hard to explain it, my deepest sense in that moment, deeper than shame or indignation, was a sense of relief, disappointment. The foe which I had

sometimes fearfully fancied myself fighting, with all the forces which Heaven itself could give me, suddenly uncovered, and showed itself a mean and puny thing.

"Mr. Kimball," I said slowly, "you have been entirely mistaken in me."

"Not entirely, I think," he said, crossing his arms upon his breast, a lightly satirical touch in his tone. "I have studied you with infinite care and infinite entertainment. You are not a schoolgirl. You must have known that something like this was to be the end."

I was silent for a few seconds.

"I wished not to believe it," I said very low.

"What do you suppose the world believes?" he asked, with the cynical gesture of brow and shoulder he had learned in Paris along with so many other things more diabolical.

I trembled from head to foot, but at that moment there shot through my frame a strange, even violent physical sensation, faintly foreshadowed indeed in the days just passed, but never fully felt before. In the familiar, deeply

significant phrase, I "felt life"—quickenings. The sensation with all its denotement of maternal hope, its firm fetter of fidelity to the man who was to be the father of my child, nerved me with a power I had never possessed before. I knew that I was safe. I knew that the heart of my husband could safely trust in me. I knew that no art or device however seductive, however terrible, could compass now my ruin. I seemed to grow taller, firmer, prouder and yet more humble.

"I have been very wrong; I can see it now," I said with a new quietness, "but it has not been so simple. I should know better after this. The world may believe what it will, what you choose to have it. I shall never, willingly, see you again."

With this I turned to leave the room. Ross Kimball did not stir from his place, however, and the door by which we had entered, being closed, had become indistinguishable.

"Is this your final word?" he asked, speaking low and with peculiar distinctness, his face

even paler than its wont, his eyelids drooping as if to hide their light.

“It is,” I said solemnly.

“I am not quite through, however,” he said with an assumed carelessness, slowly drawing his watch by its fob from his trousers pocket and glancing at it coolly. “We have not been in this room five minutes yet. We can have two minutes more safely, which is all I want.”

I had retreated as far as might be, and stood now hard against the shining mirror of the wall.

“Very well,” I said, and bent my head.

“You must permit me to say,” he began with icy politeness, “that while you are possibly at this moment particularly pleased with yourself, are looking upon yourself it may be as something of a heroine, a model of persecuted purity and that kind of thing, I am looking upon you, reluctantly, it is true, with something very like contempt.”

He paused a moment and then as I did not speak he continued with the same air of studied, unimpassioned fairness,

“Let me tell you why. You have the mind, the soul of the courtesan without her courage. It is courage which fails you now, not principle which guides you. Another thing, you are absolutely cold, incapable of love. If you really loved, you would throw your body into the scale to win your lover without a tremor. But that you will never do, because you will never forget yourself in a great emotion.”

“I think that may be true,” I said with composure.

“I despise you for another reason, as I despise all women of the world who pride themselves on their virtue—because you are a hypocrite. Notice, if you will, what you have done, as others do. You uncover your body to the very verge of decency, you furnish it then with every allurement to the senses conceivable, of color, of fragrance, of texture, and thus prepared you give yourself into a man’s arms. In this guise you dance with him—motion, contact, voluptuous music all adding their effect. What is it all for? For the express purpose, I notice,

of arousing the sense nature in the man, if by any chance it is asleep or at peace. This noble end is gained, gained easily. Sense awakes and claims its natural satisfaction. But upon this you retreat shuddering with disgust, amazement, horror at the man's brutality. This you call virtue."

His eyes rested now full upon me and scorched me with their withering contempt. My own fell before them, unable to sustain their gaze. The man was more formidable even than I had divined.

Mr. Kimball advanced then, touched a spring, near me as I stood; a part of the mirror slid back, disclosing the door. He opened it, bowing me out with formal and dignified courtesy. But in the very instant of crossing the threshold a swift transition passed over him. He caught my hand from behind as he followed me, and gently drawing me back bent and pressed his lips repeatedly upon my shoulder, murmuring, as he did so,

"Forgive me, for I love you. If you did but know what love is!"

The light, passionate contact of his lips upon my flesh filled me with a fury of terror and dismay. I was not safe after all. Perhaps the worst was yet to come after my sorry victory had been, as I thought, won. Smothering a cry of distress I broke away from his touch and flew down the stairs just before me. Blinded and dizzy with fear and agitation I did not note the first landing, and so missed my footing, plunging violently forward against the iron rail opposite, striking my side with extreme force, so that for a moment I was sure a rib was broken. I clasped my hands against my side, conscious not only of the anguish there but of a more profound shock and sensation throughout my body.

Ross Kimball was at my side instantly, well-bred although with distant concern on his face.

"How unfortunate," he said, with bitter irony, "and yet what can be expected when Innocence is pursued by the Devil himself! But are you hurt, Mrs. Lloyd?"

"Oh, it is nothing," I answered breathlessly, hastening on down the stairs. "Nothing of any

account. Still, I believe I will go home. I will not wait for my husband."

He looked keenly in my face. We had reached the foot of the stairs.

"By all means," he said. "I will send a carriage to the south entrance for you. You will prefer to go out this way." He advanced now to the small grade door which opened from the rear of the house, and laid his hand upon the knob.

"Oh, yes, thank you," I said, trembling so violently that my teeth chattered as I spoke. "There is a dressing-room there?"—then, my voice breaking utterly and tears like a child's coming in spite of me, I cried,

"Oh, Mr. Kimball, I am so cold; how can I get my cloak? Tell me how to get away without seeing people."

We stood face to face at the narrow door, his hand upon the knob. He smiled. The irony of the situation smote upon him then as it did not upon me until later.

"Directly at the right of the south entrance you will find a small anteroom which has not

been used to-night. The door, however, is unlocked. Go in and ring the bell and send for your cloak. By the time it is brought to you the carriage will be waiting. Can I do anything for you? I would accompany you if——”

“Pray do not think of it,” I murmured, with a gesture of unconscious command. He opened the door obedient to it; I stepped out on the dim terrace and heard the door close fast behind me.

The night air revived my failing sense. No one, fortunately, was in sight, and I hurried forward, almost running at first in my agitation, toward the great porte-cochère which, outlined with countless electric lights, stood out boldly against the sky. Just before I came within the circle of its brilliant light I caught sight of a man pacing slowly to and fro enjoying a solitary cigar, for I caught the odor. No matter. I moderated my speed. Whoever it was he could hardly have seen me as I first came out. There was nothing now to cause especial comment. I would pass this person swiftly; he need not see my face.

When I reached the spot, however, the man had stopped his pacing, and stood as if to intercept me. To my surprise I saw that it was Dr. Kirke. He held out his hand, not in greeting, but as if to arrest my progress.

"Do not run like that," he said almost curtly, then paused, took a contemplative whiff at his cigar, and added, "And do not dance any more."

That was all. He walked on then, and I hastened forward to my goal. So he knew a cause for caution and perhaps had known all along!

I found the small anteroom empty as promised, entered, closed the door and rang. In the brief interval which succeeded I walked to a mantel mirror and glanced at myself. I looked like death, my face gray, drawn and haggard above the clasping of the rose and pearls of my throat band.

"No wonder Ross Kimball did not choose to be met walking with such a hunted specter," I thought, unclasped the thing from my throat

and let it fall upon the mantel. It seemed to suffocate me. I looked down upon the gleaming folds, the delicate embroidery of my gown. Just then a servant came and I gave him directions to find and bring my evening wrap. It was a long coat of white broadcloth fitted to button from neck to hem. While I waited I walked rapidly up and down the room unfastening loops and hooks with nervous fingers. Again the servant came. I took my coat from his hands and again locked the door. The windows were closely guarded by shades and heavy drapery. Then with feverish haste, my eyes on a mantel clock which showed the stroke of twelve almost reached, I tore the beautiful, hateful garment off from my body, tossing it with unspeakable loathing far from me over a chair. Then I slipped into my own coat, buttoned it carefully to the very feet and so hastened from the room, locking the door after me and leaving the key as I passed upon a silver dish I chanced to see. The carriage stood waiting. The great hall chimes were ringing melo-

diously for midnight as I entered it. The coachman knew, I found, where he was to go. There were three miles to drive to reach C——. I leaned back in the tufted-satin seat, and the carriage rolled smoothly over the asphalt drive—past Dr. Kirke still slowly pacing the terrace.

“Rather like Cinderella, all this,” I thought, a kind of dull mechanical triviality playing over the abyss of my pain and humiliation. “I wonder if the carriage will last until I get home to my dust and ashes.”

My soul had escaped out of the snare of the fowler; the snare was broken and I had escaped, but it was with wings bruised and spirit laid waste.

XVIII

FOR twenty-four hours I fought desperately alone with severe bodily suffering, almost glad, I think, to have in this effort a diversion from my profounder pain. Saturday morning I awoke in an agony of mental confusion and apprehension. I could no longer conceal from myself or from Irving the seriousness of my condition. It was hardly more than light when Dr. Kirke came into my room, with face very grave, even stern, and sat down by my bedside. I had not known that he was coming, and I turned my face from him with sudden terror lest he had in some way learned all my shame.

I remember nothing clearly of what followed. I slept almost continuously until Sunday forenoon. When I awoke I found myself free from pain and my head clear; familiar ob-

jects bore their natural aspect; familiar actions seemed again possible. For a space I even forgot the events of Thursday night, and when again I saw the doctor entering the room I greeted him without unusual consciousness or disturbance.

He sat down in his silent fashion beside me and took my hand, studying my face thoughtfully. It was my first personal encounter with the man on his purely professional side. His eye and voice and hand I found gentler than any woman's, but behind the outer aspect of him I discerned the unrelenting probing of his mind to the center of things, the inflexible purpose to uncover and lay bare that he might afterward soothe and heal. Formerly I had complained of his manners. At this juncture such criticism seemed as lacking in pertinence as if applied to sun or wind. I felt that I bore for the time at least no relation whatever to him save that of a suffering human creature whom he was called upon to relieve. My personality, whether winning to him or detestable, was for the time non-

existent, save as his knowledge of it bore upon his diagnosis. Nevertheless, as he simply sat at my side, his hand resting for a little while upon my wrist, his eyes fixed with their searching but soothing directness upon my face, I understood suddenly the remarkable influx of vigor and repose which Irving had always received from his visits during his various illnesses. I should rather say, I felt the same thing in myself. I understood the psychic causes of it even less than before.

“You are better, and I hope you have now escaped the great risk you ran into,” he said briefly, smiling slightly at the energy of my movements. When he released my wrist I had clasped both hands together and thrown them with a movement habitual to me above my head. “That is not a good thing to do, just now, though.”

I looked up at him with surprise and question in my eyes, then with a child's instant docility drew my arms down and let them lie decorously at my sides.

"I don't know how to behave," I said meekly. "I have always been ridiculously well."

"So I see. Probably that is one reason why you have not been awake to the need of taking better care of yourself lately."

My eyes fell.

"I have tried to be careful," I murmured hesitatingly.

Dr. Kirke shook his head. Then he said gently,

"I saw on Thursday night that you were running a serious risk in the way you dressed. Probably no one not professional would have suspected your condition. That was all wrong—all wrong," he repeated with a touch of severity.

I pressed my lips together rebelliously and felt that I hated this man worse now than when I saw him first.

"I saw, too, that you danced a good deal, danced several dances in succession—the motion was sustained for a considerable time. Did you not know the danger this might bring upon you?"

I shook my head. What right had he to be watching everything I did Thursday night?

"You see what it did bring upon you," he remarked quietly. I did not reply, but tapped the coverlet impatiently with my finger-tips. He was all astray, but I could not tell him so.

"Mrs. Lloyd, you will pardon me, but the question could hardly fail to rise in my mind last night whether you were not willing to run this risk, as many women unhappily are," and his eyes searched mine with unrelenting seriousness. "If this was the case I must insist upon knowing it, and I must ask you to employ another physician."

I returned his look, my eyes unswerving, flashing a reply half frank, half fierce, wholly indignant.

"You are cruel, cruel!" I exclaimed. "I never wanted anything so much as I want my baby; I may be very bad, but I have a little good grain too!" and with that I burst into passionate weeping.

"It was not my fault, it was not what you

think," I wailed piteously. "It was not the dancing or—the other—" and remembering with sudden vividness the physical shock I had received, and under what circumstances, a long shuddering sob broke from me.

Dr. Kirke placed one hand upon my forehead, with the other smoothing my hands with a firm, gentle motion. Instantly I became perfectly calm.

"There, there," he said with incredible tenderness, "it is all right. You are a good girl, and you shall be taken good care of. I will not scold you any more. You have had your lesson. Keep perfectly still now for twenty-four hours, and I will see you to-morrow."

For three days I appeared to improve, although I thought I saw that the Doctor was somewhat troubled, not perfectly satisfied. On Wednesday night Irving went for him in hot haste. I was violently ill.

Throughout the night the Doctor, to my feverish fancy, seemed to hold in his hand thunderbolts of pain which he darted into my frame

in a steady, remorseless rhythm of inconceivable agony. I was sure the wielding of that torture was all in his hands.

Quiet came at sunrise and with it the death of my hope. They were all pitiful and kind, but I begged them all to go and leave me, for my heart I thought was broken.

My recovery was prompt and natural and the Doctor's attendance ceased almost at once. Fixed between us lay my weak but passionate resentment that he believed me by my vanity and lightmindedness verily guilty for the loss of my child. In a far deeper sense I knew I was touched by this taint, but I chose to cherish this superficial vexation regarding his misunderstanding, the better to cloak to myself my mortal pain.

XIX

WHEN three weeks had passed I was able to move about the house again, and I had ceased to be interesting, as far as my physical condition was concerned, even to my husband and my nurse. Miss Webster had come to us immediately upon my being taken ill. Irving left home for a business expedition to the West. Miss Webster began to talk of leaving, but we persuaded her to remain during Irving's absence that I might not be left alone.

All the while I knew that I was less perfectly recovered than appeared. Not for one moment had the pain ceased in my bruised side since that night of horror. There were times when it became excruciating, but always I kept it resolutely to myself. What if it should by any chance become known to Dr. Kirke? I had a

conviction that if this happened the corroding shame which defiled my memory could not escape his searching eyes. From this I shrank supremely and I hid my pain with a ferocity of determination, hoping against hope that it would gradually leave me. Sometimes I hoped that it would swiftly kill me, but that I reflected bitterly would be more merciful than life and death as I had found them.

The day after Irving left it seemed for a few hours as if all my painful concealment had been in vain. I had a sharp chill, followed by a very high temperature and intense headache. In spite of my protests and persuasions, the nurse sent for Dr. Kirke. He questioned me very closely and seemed to ponder my condition with troubled and even perplexed seriousness. I treated the whole matter as lightly as possible, answered all his questions as briefly as I could and insisted peevishly that the attack must be malarial—I knew it was precisely like illnesses Irving had had when a little quinine and care had pulled him out in short order.

The Doctor rose after I had thus delivered myself. With quiet emphasis he said to me,

“Do not carry this too far.” Then, remarking that under the circumstances he could not prescribe, he left with a curt good-by. He perceived my lack of frankness plainly. I saw that he did and was the more afraid of him.

The next day, after a sleepless night, I persisted in rising and dressing myself in a house gown without the nurse's assistance. Having had breakfast in my room I came down to the library at ten o'clock and went straight to my desk. With all the nerve and control which I could rally I forced myself to sit erect and to write without perceptible trembling in my hand the note I had determined to send to the Doctor. It told him briefly and formally that I was quite myself, dressed and about the house, and that it would be unnecessary for him to take the time from his pressing engagements to call upon me again. I regretted that the nurse had troubled him on so slight an occasion, etc.

Having despatched this note (of which I did

not choose Miss Webster to have knowledge) by special messenger to Dr. Kirke's house, I moved restlessly about my hall and library. I was bent on galvanizing myself into energy, on forcing upon myself oblivion of my bodily anguish. I paused before the open book-shelves with which the room was lined. Why not read? I had always been able to divert myself with books in the small ailments I had hitherto known. At random I drew a book from the selves and fluttered its leaves over with hot and trembling hand. My eye caught a startling heading in large print over a page: "How Love Looked for Hell." I tried to read and discern the meaning but it was dim to me. But on the same page I found the following and this I read with swift, eager eyes to the last word:—

*"Thou Ship of Earth, with Death, and Birth and Life
and Sex aboard,
And fires of Desires burning hotly in the hold,
I fear thee, O! I fear thee, for I hear the tongue and
Sword
At battle on the deck, and the wild mutineers are bold.*

*“ The dewdrop morn may fall from off the petal of the sky,
But all the deck is wet with blood and stains the
crystal red.
A pilot, God, a pilot! for the helm is left awry,
And the best sailors in the ship lie there among the
dead! ”*

What did the man mean who wrote it? What did it mean to me who read it? I could not have told, but I felt the answer to both questions, dimly, inarticulately. It troubled me, and I tossed the book away with a little groan and clasped my hands hard against my side. What was this clutching, tearing thing with beak and talons which I called pain? If I called it pleasure would it not serve as well? What was pain—what was pleasure? Why could I not make use of the theories of Christian Science? Pain was not; fever was not. I was in perfect health if I would but believe so. Neither was there any sin. Evil was only delusion. What then of the facts burned into my consciousness and burning there unceasingly? Were they too delusion? Was that room with its seductive re-

finement of beauty only a mirage, a fevered dream? What of Ross Kimball?—his terrible tenderness, his scorching passion, his lips upon my shoulder, the shafts of his scorn piercing my heart? Were these all *maya, maya*? Oh, if that could only be true! But if all these were delusion I too was a delusion, a burning, throbbing, demoniacal, delirious nothing, and nothing was but what was not! I laughed aloud and knew the sound of my laughing was weird and grotesque.

Perhaps Ross Kimball himself was a delusion. Certainly no sign or token of any sort whatsoever had reached me of his existence since that Thursday night. I wondered idly if he had discovered the Carlier gown and the ornaments where I had left them; if he had taken them on his own arm and carried them up that steep iron stair and laid them in the still beauty of that shameful room. I could see him enter it. The hyacinths and roses would be drooping. The lustrous trailing garment would again be reflected in the mirror, but its folds would hang

limp and lifeless. The panel thus made would not have the artistic effect for which he had so carefully striven, when a warm, living woman, passion pale, her firm, rounded limbs caressed by its folds, should have been reflected there! How well I discerned all that had been in his refined epicurean fancy. He had prepared a potent spell for flesh and sense; he had looked to be drunk with beauty, exhilarated with conquest—and this was the end—spurning and mockery and hard hate: an empty room, an empty gown. Did the keys which were to have been mine still lie on the marquetry table? What would he do with the Boldini now? Perhaps the woman whom he chose next would like it; but many people did not fancy it overmuch. I could see him now as he turned from the room. The mirror slipped back to its place, the door swung to on its hinges and shut fast. He was coming down the stairs and where the insolence of confident anticipation had been beating in his brain the poison of hate and revenge were working now. What would their working be? Cruel as

the grave, that I knew, but subtle and studied after the man's fashion. Should I ever see him again? and would he caress me with his eyes before he killed me? For of course he would kill me—in soul, in spirit, if not in body. Perhaps he had killed me already.

In my pacing of the library I had come back to the fireplace and now stood on the hearth-rug, beside Irving's great-chair, on the spot where Ross Kimball had stood when I first saw him. Again I seemed to see him bodily before me, distinguished, graceful, ironical, with that mysterious appeal of his to the nerves which set them all in vibration. Something passed through me like an electric shock. I seemed to myself paralyzed. Instinctively I put out my hand and touched the arm of the chair to find if I could feel it—it seemed far away. Chairs too were delusions then—all was *maya*, yes, all. Then I fell unconscious.

When I came to myself I was lying on the broad leather-covered library lounge, and the nurse was moistening my lips with some pun-

gent drug. I looked at her and instantly remembered everything.

"Whatever you do, whatever happens to me," I articulated distinctly but with difficulty, "do *not* send for Dr. Kirke."

"I have not sent for him," she whispered; "but he is here."

Then I saw that some one stood behind her, and Dr. Kirke pushed her gently away and bent over me. He did not speak. What did he mean to do? He seemed to be unfastening the front of my dress; it had already been loosened and laid back from my neck while I had been unconscious. Dark reddish streaks had thus become visible raying upward from the inflammation below.

"What are you doing?" I whispered, looking up into his face with frightened eyes and pushing feebly at his hands.

"Be quiet," he said not unkindly, but in a way which told me it was useless to struggle against him. "There is trouble here. Turn if you please on the left side," and with the words

he himself moved me as if I had been a child. With sure and steady hands he drew or cut away my inner clothing, asked the nurse for more light from the nearest window, and then sent her for a bowl of hot water, antiseptics and linen cloths.

I tried weakly to turn, to push him away, to rearrange my clothing. I was frightened, defiant, maddened almost that he had discovered my secret, but most of all I was powerless. His hand, strong, unyielding, albeit gentle, held me fast. He spoke in the most matter-of-fact manner, an undertone of easy habitual control just perceptible.

"It is necessary, Mrs. Lloyd, to lance this abscess which is making you so much trouble, without delay. It is not safe to neglect it for another hour. Have I your permission?"

"Yes," I said with defiant coldness. "I do not care what you do now, Dr. Kirke."

"That is right. That is all we want."

I heard steps. The door opened. Miss Webster returned.

“I will ask you to hold Mrs. Lloyd’s hands,” the Doctor said in an undertone with a swift gesture. She obeyed, coming to the opposite side of the lounge and kneeling with an anxious, pitying face beside me. Then I closed my eyes, hopeless of further resistance. Scalding tears flowed down my cheeks, but I held my body motionless.

Then followed the poignant darting pang of the lancet which I bore without a tremor. The nurse bent then and kissed my bare arm as it lay across her white apron. I could feel her tears. She loved me.

The Doctor worked over the wound for a few painful moments more with his skilled but unsparing touch; then the soft coolness of the smooth linen bandages, firmly, swiftly drawn, succeeded; he turned me gently to an easier position and the physical ordeal was over.

“What right had you?” I murmured, flashing still unquenched defiance through my tears, and the desperation of my weakness. “I wrote to you not to come.”

He looked at me with a smile of genuine amusement.

“It was too bad, was it not? I received the note and wondered how much longer you would hold out. Unluckily, we doctors have to take an oath to save people’s lives if we can, even when they don’t want us to.”

Then he followed the nurse out of the room to wash his hands. When he returned I was quite calm and already easier. The Doctor stood by the table and looked over at me with a musing half-smile on his face.

“Mrs. Lloyd,” he said, with slow, peculiar emphasis, “you have any amount of grit and of sense, as you have shown just now and often before. How does it happen that you can act like—pardon me! to put it moderately—a congenital idiot?” the words were spoken with a whimsical cadence which saved them from harshness.

“What do you mean?” I asked simply, feeling much less vindictive than a few minutes before.

“You have received a serious injury on your side which has resulted in this gathering. It happened several weeks ago, I perceive. It has been criminally neglected. Why?”

“For a reason that I can never explain to you or to any other person,” I said after a painful pause.

There was a long silence, broken only by a choking sob now and then which I could not perfectly suppress. I lifted my eyes at last. Dr. Kirke was looking down upon me as I lay in my piteous weakness with a grave compassion which softened his face to tenderness.

“You do not need to, poor child,” and as he spoke he stepped nearer and placed his hand not on my forehead, but on my head as if in absolving benediction. In another moment he was gone.

But in that simple action the Doctor had conveyed to me a sense that, whatever had been or was yet to be, he mysteriously comprehended the nature of my suffering, the sin-sickness

which lay upon me so heavily, and that in spite of all he believed in me. I knew that his faith once bestowed was impregnable. I knew that I had found a friend. I took courage to believe a very little in myself.

XX

IRVING returned from the West and settled into his ordinary routine of work, hopeful of brilliant results from his association with Ross Kimball's building operation. Upon the indorsement and recommendation of the great financier he felt his future in large measure to depend.

I soon began to recover rapidly, but I was obliged to retain my nurse, Miss Webster, to dress the wound in my side. The Doctor looked in now and then to make sure that all was right. Sarah Kirke came often to see me and treated me with a certain imperative, motherly kindness. I awoke shortly to the fact that she was the only person who did visit me. Mine had been a long and painful and disastrous illness, but as I looked back I suddenly became aware that after the first week not a soul, save a neigh-

bor or two, no one in fine from my proper world, had been near me, had so much as sent me a message, a note or a flower. And in our world we did so much of that kind of thing! My rector had not even inquired at my door, so far as I could hear; and where was his wife, my companion in the Paris days, my most obliging and altogether unconscious decoy bird? The same, I found on reflection, was true of her.

The autumn weather was fine that year. I began to go out a little, walking slowly, and not quite steadily at first in the nearest park. No one invited me to drive, although most of my friends kept horses. Occasionally I met acquaintances. They stopped and spoke with me politely, and I detected curiosity at least in their concern, but I felt something of constraint, even of uneasiness in their manner. Moreover, they were always on their way to some very immediate appointment. I would return with a dull and leaden weight on my spirit, would be grateful to my nurse for liking to be with me, and would seek to interest myself in the old vivid

fashion, in making and keeping my house shining and beautiful. But there seemed so little motive now. No one ever came to see us any more, and Irving was always preoccupied I found in those days, unresponsive and unob-servant. He looked careworn, hollow-cheeked and blue-lipped. Sometimes I would ask him questions regarding his professional work, thinking he might be missing my participation. I was not strong yet, but I could begin a little on the old lines again and perhaps it would do me good. However, he always turned me off with some colorless excuse which I dimly felt covered something like resentment at the suggestion that he could need my help. I began to surmise that there was very little to help about, the rather as his old, almost forgotten habit of fretting and petty nagging about trifles of household and personal expense returned strangely upon him, adding to the cheerlessness of the situation. He let me know plainly after a little that he considered it a reckless piece of extravagance to keep the nurse when I was so

far recovered. I dismissed her promptly and thereafter I was left to sit day after day in my silent house and brood over the swift punishment meted out to one who was bold enough to thwart Ross Kimball's cherished purposes. No human being but himself could guess the travail of my spirit in any degree. He, least of all, perhaps, could have understood its deeps. The pain of this social ostracism was but the faint reflex of the awful sense of defiled womanhood which I had borne within since that night.

But worse was to follow. One morning while I walked alone in the park with slow, aimless feet, quick steps came behind me and a man I knew very slightly in the fashionable world, by name Mortimer Masson, overtook me and walked beside me. This man, known for a worthless, contemptible degenerate, was tolerated in society because his family was one of Colonial distinction, one of the oldest in the commonwealth, and he still clung to a remnant of what had been a considerable fortune. The man had always been odious to me. I had shunned

him invariably from the first time I met him, but he had contrived to maintain a bare bowing acquaintance with me, never more. On this occasion I was struck immediately by a change in his bearing toward me. He greeted me with confident familiarity, and as we walked on I felt his eyes resting on my face with a flattery of scarcely disguised insolence. I sought to hurry on and escape, but this was obviously impossible, as a long, unbroken path extended before us and the park must be traversed and a wide square crossed before I could win my own door.

Masson began at once to enlarge upon the hardship my prolonged absence had caused my admirers; I had hardly been seen since the Kimball affair; what a thoroughly vulgar, parvenu show it had been, by the way! These self-made men were all insufferable. They thought they could buy everything, but blood and breeding were not commercial commodities. No woman of taste could tolerate a man of that stamp very long. That he could understand perfectly. Then followed a torrent of fulsome flattery of my ap-

pearance on that night, which lasted until we came in sight of my own house, when he saluted me with exaggerated gallantry and walked away.

That day I ate no food. Hour after hour I spent in tasting instead the bitter flavor of the cup pressed to my lips to drink. Surely worse than this could not be.

So I sat alone with my wordless wretchedness when in the afternoon Irving came home in the early twilight, earlier than his wont. I was surprised that he did not presently come into the library to greet me. I heard him go up-stairs, and when half an hour had passed I followed and found him lying on a sofa near the fireplace in the wide upper hall. There was neither fire nor light.

“Why, my dear!” I exclaimed, with a determined effort to appear myself, my heart crying out for a look and word of tenderness from him, “the idea of your staying up here in the dark! Let me build up the fire and we will have a cozy twilight talk together. You came home early, didn’t you?”

"I hope you will not build a fire, Sidney," Irving replied with icy gloom. "You know, I suppose, how expensive wood is. At least let us save unnecessary expenses. We have got to cut down somewhere."

"Yes, certainly, Irving. I am sorry I forgot. Are you quite well, dear?" and with this I drew a footstool up by the sofa and sat down, drawing his hand between my own.

"As well as usual, I believe," he said briefly.

He left his hand lying in mine, but without the faintest response of touch or pressure. I might as well have held his glove. There was absolute silence. Stirred by his peculiarly impassive gloom I said at length,

"Would you rather I would go away, Irving?"

"I do not know that I care particularly," he replied coldly after a pause of some seconds.

I rose then, deeply hurt, and went to my own room. The deck-chair I had brought home with me from the *Lucania* stood always under my window. In it I lay in the chill and darkness

alone for an hour, wondering what new turn the wheel of torture was to take.

The next day it was the same, and the day after. Each day Irving confronted me with the same haggard, careworn countenance, the stark gloom in his eyes, the bitter compression of his lips, the invariable cold repulse to my efforts at sympathy and understanding. I should have thought that a supreme inner suffering would have made me less sensitive to outward sources of depression, but I did not find it so. Every night I lay awake in nameless apprehension, feeling all the fabric of our life and of our home crumbling down about us, with lover and friend put far from me, and nowhere help or hope.

I was still far from strong and my nerves had been profoundly shaken. On the fourth day Irving appeared earlier than on previous days and walked into the upper room where I sat in a long white wrapper—my side still troubled me—trying to embroider a poor bit of drapery which I loathed. When I saw on his face the same grim, desperate darkness, deeper

it seemed to me than ever, I realized that the climax was reached, for I could bear no more.

“Irving!” I cried, with piercing earnestness, “tell me what is the matter or I shall be insane. You are killing me, dear, by the way you treat me. Whatever has happened, let me know it, let us bear it together.”

“Perhaps it would be better if we were both dead,” he replied with sullen hardness.

I rose from my reclining chair and stepped toward him. My spirit was roused at last and I faced him without fear or flinching.

“You shall tell me what you mean,” I said sternly. “I will not bear this silence another minute.”

“I imagine you know what I mean, Sidney, pretty well already,” he said, glancing aside and throwing himself on the deep window-seat wearily. “In fact, I judge that you could if you chose fill out in full what I only know in broken hints.”

“Tell what are the broken hints and I can answer you,” I said haughtily, with an uncon-

trollable sinking in my heart as I saw that his faith in me was not beyond swerving.

“You really want me to, do you?” he said, fixing a gaunt, bitter glance upon my face.

I bent my head.

“Very well, then. This is the kind of thing the Clubs are full of just now—a little perhaps will be all you will care for—Lloyd is no architect, he has failed flat in everything he has undertaken, conspicuously on his interior work for Ross Kimball’s house, which had to be completely reconstructed by Hook. His wife has to have luxuries, so she finds ways to get them for herself. Ross Kimball took a fancy to her for a little while, and spent enough money on her in Paris to set up a provincial bank, but he is deadly tired of her now.”

Here Irving broke off. Something in my face I think frightened him.

“Go on,” I whispered hoarsely, my throat had become chalk dry.

“I should think that was enough. It was enough for me any way. This though is par-

ticularly choice—Ross Kimball, they are saying, has promised Mort Masson to keep him in wine and cigars a year if he will take—*my wife*—off his hands.”

With this Irving rose, thrust his hands deep in his pockets and strode up and down the room, his face fairly livid, his eyes on the floor.

I stood motionless, save that, having just before taken up a fine embroidered handkerchief from my dressing-table, I now, with absolute unconsciousness of what I was doing, began tearing it with nice deliberation into narrow, even strips. This action presently caught Irving’s eye. He stopped and stood watching my hands silently for an instant. Then, in a change of tone from the tragic intensity which had marked the conversation thus far to one of trivial fretfulness, he asked sharply,

“Isn’t that a particularly expensive handkerchief, Sidney?”

I looked at him steadily, musing a little on the curious unreality which this question seemed to cast on all that had gone before.

"Yes," I said slowly, perceiving what I had done. "I ought to have selected a commoner one."

I spoke with perfect gravity. I do not think Irving detected the ghastly sarcasm. He went on walking. I watched his misery and grew gentle.

"My husband does not believe these things," I said. "Of that I can be sure, so we will not quite despair, even yet."

There was silence.

"Surely, Irving," I cried then with urgent appeal, "you can not let me think that you do believe that I am—what they say!"

"I do not want to, Sidney; you may be sure of that. It has been killing me, and not slowly either, all this week—but what can I think? Where there is so much smoke there is always some fire. And you know Ross Kimball has taken you about and given you expensive things—oh, you know it all better than I do!" and his look was of weary disgust.

"Irving," I said, with the quietness which

despair gives, for I felt that I had sounded now the lowest depths of human misery, "all that I have accepted from that man has been with your express knowledge and approval," and I recalled to his mind the events that have been recounted here. Of the room which had been prepared for me I found it impossible to speak to Irving. Instinct told me that it was better to bury that in silence.

"Is this all—all that has happened between you?" he questioned harshly.

"No." My head dropped then and my voice faltered. "On the night we were at his house, that second of October, he made it known to me that he wished an impossible relation to exist between us. I found then that all he had done for me, for us both, had been with this horrid end in view."

"What did you do?"

Then I looked straight in my husband's face and felt no veil of shame upon my own.

"The only thing I could do, Irving. I repulsed, rejected everything, fairly fled from

him. Of course he will never forgive me—but—at least—oh Irving!”

With all my soul hanging upon him, with its supreme and solemn appeal for his sovereign wrath, his protecting pity, I suddenly perceived that of all these none was in his face. Its look was of dogged dejection and disfavor. Then I cried to God, for I knew that vain was the help of man. I had sounded now a deep still below the deep.

“Of course he will never forgive you, nor me either,” Irving was saying, I found a little later. “You should have foreseen this, knowing what was at stake. You could have used a little finesse in turning him away. There must have been some way to soften things down a little and not make a man like that your bitter enemy.”

My limbs seemed suddenly to lose their strength. I dropped back upon my reclining chair, staring blankly.

Irving stepped forward and stood looking down upon me.

“We are undone, Sidney, that is the whole of it. It is shipwreck, nothing less. Ross Kimball is strong enough to sink any man when he sets out, as many a man knows to his sorrow—as I am finding out every day now. And as for a woman’s reputation—well, we won’t talk about it any more. You have been very imprudent” (and his voice added by its inflection—“if nothing more”), “and the sooner we can get away from C—— now the better it will be for both of us. I can not live where I am no longer respected. Good-by, Sidney.”

“Where are you going?” I asked mechanically, my lips moving stiffly, with difficulty to frame the words.

“Back to Boston. You needn’t have dinner for me. I have arranged to dine at the Parker House with a man who may be willing to buy the house, if you consent, and if we can agree on terms. We will talk it over later.”

He bent and kissed me, but his kiss was cold. He went immediately down-stairs and in a few minutes more the outer door closed upon him.

So the house was going too! Had I not felt it crumble in the night when all was still? This was shipwreck, Irving said. If only the waves would close quickly over my head! Then there strayed back into my mind, by some trick of association, the lines which I had read that other day. Slowly, audibly I repeated them, calling each word back as I pronounced it from the blank of forgetfulness.

*"A pilot, God, a pilot! for the helm is left awry,
And the best sailors in the ship lie there among the
dead!"*

As in paroxysms of physical agony some formula of words, however unmeaning, will mechanically reiterate itself on the lips of the sufferer, so in the hour which followed, these two lines said themselves perpetually in my brain.

Some one knocked at length on my door, just as the lights began to shine out in the street below. It was my maid.

"Dr. Kirke has come, Mrs. Lloyd. Would you wish to see him up here? I think, ma'am, he is rather in a hurry."

For a moment I could not think who Dr. Kirke was. The maid waited patiently a full minute, while I rose, crossed the room to my dressing-table, looked mechanically at my hair, and then turned to her and said,

“Who did you say had come?”

She repeated her first statement word for word.

I forced myself to look at her with intelligence and recognition of what she said. I believe I even smiled.

“Yes. Let him come up here if he will.”

Then, in so short a time that I was sure he must have followed her up the stairs, Dr. Kirke came into the room. I saw at once that he was preoccupied with some grave anxiety and in haste. He did not take the chair I offered.

“How is the side? Is the nurse dressing it regularly, as I told her?”

“I let the nurse go, Dr. Kirke, a week ago.”

The Doctor frowned.

“What in the name of common sense did you do that for?” and a quick motion of his hand

indicated that he must himself examine conditions. In weary submission and unbroken silence I removed the sleeve of my wrapper and adjusted the inner clothing. While I did this the Doctor with quick movements had drawn the shades and turned on the light. Warm water and towels were just at hand. Without a word on either side he went through the process of removing the dry, heated dressings, cleansing the wound still not fully healed and putting on fresh bandages. His touch I noticed was peculiarly rapid and dexterous, but so gentle that I almost felt the pity in his finger-tips.

He rose when all was done and remarked that I was not having quite the care that the case demanded.

“I must look after you a little better, I see,” he said, and smiled his quiet smile, then grew graver as he observed my face and asked me a few questions. “My sister is coming to see you to-night, I believe,” he added later, “or to-morrow morning.”

He bowed then a silent good-by, and with

light but firm, rapid step left the room. But when I was left alone I experienced in an extraordinary degree the irresistible effluence of comfort and uplifting which flowed from Dr. Kirke's mere presence and from his silent, steady power.

He had said not one word of sympathy to me, barely one of passing personal interest. He had sought to convey no significance in looks which he would not commit to speech. Nevertheless, I knew as perfectly as if he had sworn to it, that though I was all that calumny had made me and he knew it, he would still have looked upon me with his great compassion without hardness or contempt and would still have sought to succor me, body and soul, with his healing touch. Tears came to me then and sleep.

XXI

SARAH KIRKE came early in the morning and the maid brought her to my room.

"You are a lamb," she assured me bending over my bed and using her somewhat abrupt style of petting. "You are a lamb and you are going to be gathered in arms and carried in bosoms for a while now. It is high time! Come, put out your feet and I will slip on your stockings."

"I am afraid I am not able to get up, Miss Kirke," I said, turning a plaintive look up toward her. It was so new to be petted after this fashion.

"Oh, yes," she said cheerfully, "you will feel better after you have been up a little. I will help you to dress and then put you in my carriage which is waiting, and take you home with me for a fortnight at least. You need looking after."

Obstacles and arguments were borne down with imperative decision. Irving's comfort was amply provided for. Everything had been considered. I went with her. I knew perfectly well that if I had remained proud and prosperous and popular this woman's interest would not have been bestowed upon me, and never should I have been taken into her home save as a formal visitor to its outer courts. But now I was poor, suffering, neglected, slandered, broken-hearted. All that gave others the excuse to pass me by on the other side gave me my claim on Sarah Kirke's innermost treasures of sustaining sympathy. I did not know, however, until long afterward, that this present line of action was the result of an impulse of the Doctor's conceived only at the moment when he told me that his sister would call upon me soon.

I had never been beyond Miss Kirke's reception-room before. The moment I entered the rooms in which she and the Doctor lived I felt in them the vitalizing atmosphere of their inmates. It was an enormous house, and it was

only the second floor which was given up to invalid guests. I was not counted as one of these, but rather as one of the family.

The first floor contained in separate suites the offices and private apartments of the Kirkes, and beside these a great library, hall and dining-room. Everywhere I found certain things in evidence: spotless cleanliness, comfort, repose, simplicity, books and sunshine. There seemed to have been no calculation for esthetic effect; there was no elaborate overrefinement, no coquetry of things, no finesse in these rooms. All was homely, low-toned, destitute of self-consciousness. In fine they bore a masculine rather than a feminine expression. But the library was lined with books to the ceiling, save for the wide, uncurtained windows which always stood open level with the lovely old garden; the chimney was enormous and in it great logs were always burning with a heart of deep-red embers beneath; a great oak table, as sturdy and strong as the Doctor, held endless store of magazines and books, chiefly indeed scientific I found; and

there was an unstinted number of no less sturdy and inviting easy-chairs. Dogs were everywhere, small and great. Sarah Kirke's favorite was a white collie, but I immediately adopted for my own intimate companionship a large Irish setter named Barbarossa, commonly known as Bab. Something in his somber eyes under the amorphous, overhanging brow, together with his mild mouth, suggested his master to me in a curious and even moving degree. The presence of so much wholesome animal life ever about me, strong, sluggish even, destitute of self-consciousness or introspection, ministered I believe in a large degree to my recovery of poise and health.

Altogether I found my new abode a place to make no demand upon me for the nerve effort of response, of admiration and appreciation, but a place where I could let myself and my cares go clean out of sight.

I had never seen maids like Sarah Kirke's. They were always charmingly neat in pink cotton gowns and white aprons, and always con-

veyed an effect of quiet but enthusiastic satisfaction in the privilege of bringing one at all hours and in all places a cup of tea, a plate of fruit, an added pillow or rug, a fresh magazine, a few perfect flowers. I had never been so taken care of in my life, never made so blessedly comfortable. I was like a frightened child who is afterward soothed and petted; who finds all his terrors suddenly vanishing and learns that he can smile again.

Sarah Kirke herself was the busiest woman and the most energetic I ever knew and in her own domain an absolute monarch. I found her much less plain at home than as I had more commonly seen her in street costume, by reason of her very fine gray hair and the splendid molding of her head and neck which her outer garments concealed. She always wore gray silk with broad bands of sheer white lawn at throat and wrists. Whenever she entered the room where I happened to be it was as if a tonic blast had entered with her to chase away all the fogs and vapors. She took wholly into her own

hands all the care of me, both as doctor and nurse, from the day I entered her house.

The one feature of life in the Kirke house which impressed me more than all others was the outflowing, self-forgetting beneficence of service. There was a perpetual, vital contact with all forms of human need and suffering, and to each in turn virtue was given out daily in full and cordial measure. Life was lived for others' needs, not for the delight of self and sense. Such life was to me a revelation.

I lay in my spacious sunny chamber one of those first days, and pondered over these things. Sarah Kirke came in to look after me, and while she was treating my side, then almost healed, I said to her,

"I never did a good deed in my life, although I do not think it ever occurred to me to notice it before. I have given away food and clothing sometimes because it made me uncomfortable to know that people were unfed and unclothed. I gave to ease my mind. I have given away money in church collections for hospitals

and for other charities, because it was expected, and I should have been criticised if I had failed to do so. I did not like to give it particularly, but my husband always wished me to do the correct thing. But you give yourself and all that you have for these people in the house, for people like me, for everybody. You do it all the time. How does it happen that I am so utterly different?"

At first she seemed to have no answer ready. I glanced aside at her face and saw that she was thinking. At length she said with characteristic abruptness,

"It is simply a matter of motive power."

I did not answer and she spoke again, briefly, as before.

"You have heard of Christ?"

"Yes. The name is familiar, Miss Kirke."

She drew her mouth with a quaint, silent smile she sometimes had.

"I am afraid it is too late now for me to elect religion," I said musingly, and my thought ran back to the time when I had flippantly, har-

dily, coined the phrase. It was the night I first saw *him*.

Sarah Kirke had risen now to go. She was always in demand all over the house at this time in the morning. I do not think my words pained her, although she probably saw that they were half carelessly spoken.

"It is not too late," she said. "Believe anything rather than that."

So saying, she left me.

A letter from Irving lay still unread on the table. Sarah Kirke had brought it when she came in. I opened it now and found it exactly what I expected: correctly affectionate, perfunctorily solicitous—at the end an honest touch of morbid desperateness. One reading was enough. I threw it presently into the open fire. It brought no help or healing; held no spiritual essence to burn away malignant memories; no tears of tenderness to quench the flames of remorse and self-accusing. Irving and I had lived our life together as comrades-at-arms in a none too noble contest, the contest for enjoy-

ment, gain, appearance, self-advancement. We had been worsted. Our cause lost, we faced each other with mutual distrust and upbraiding, bitter though disguised—such ignoble energies as an ignoble strife engenders.

I saw Irving's mind, his nature, laid out distinctly before me in that moment. Its prime factors were "the correct thing," securing his share of the world's booty, the passion for calling forth approval, admiration, envy perhaps incidentally—wholly a man of the world. On a small scale, truly; the lines were drawn narrowly. What of that? I had seen the man of the world on the grand scale, the man who no longer needed to struggle, having attained. The prime factors were much the same. What was to choose between them?

Could I see myself as clearly? I lifted my eyes, which ached and burned, and looked listlessly across at the fireplace where the flames had died down to red embers. The open sheet of Irving's letter lay smoldering, half burned at the embers' edge. Being stout paper the

sheet had partially resisted the fire. I noted its scorched and spotted surface, seared to the center, shriveled, shapeless, the blackened edges, the meaningless marks of the writing. I saw in it my sign. Yes, my life was like that—signifying nothing now, nothing but that it had been through the fire and was spoiled.

What was the fire? What was the fire? I asked myself in dreary monotony. Then all the sick fancies ran into each other confusedly and I dozed miserably.

When I awoke I decided to let myself go for a while. Thinking terrified me.

XXII

YES, Sarah Kirke was the strongest, the finest woman I had ever had the good fortune of meeting in my life, but, strange as it will sound, in those days the companionship of Barbarossa, the great Irish setter, was secretly more welcome to me than hers. Despite all her tact and the abrupt tenderness which I quickly learned to love, I knew that she was watching me, expecting something of me, hoping I would develop at this point in my experience after a certain ideal for me which existed in her mind. But, alas, I could never take the form of anybody's ideal, and just then I was not ready to develop in any direction. Stagnation was my heaven, oblivion my chief good. I would have liked

‘ As right and true to be
As a flower or a tree——’

I was willing to be “instinct-good,” but I did not want to think about myself at all. The sub-

ject was too awful, too complex, and I was still too bruised and broken to encounter it. And so I liked best the dogs who received me with hospitality and gravely permitted me to caress them, but who expected nothing of me beyond a *bonne bouche* now and again. And best of all the dogs, as I have said, I liked Barbarossa.

To tell the whole truth I missed Dr. Kirke inexpressibly. I was finding an acute disappointment in the fact that once within the walls of his own house he had himself become to me persistently invisible. I had supposed that when I became a member of his household I should find daily opportunity for intercourse with him. I had learned to look to him as the source of light and leading on my dark and thorny way, my pilot in the stormy voyage I had made of my life thus far. I wanted him. I longed for his presence, for the look in his eyes, that troubled gentleness, that musing patience which I found in Barbarossa's. Sarah might be as strong; she was certainly as earnest and as true-hearted; but she was a woman. I was still

too much myself not to find the man's sympathy and support more availing than the woman's.

But him I saw not. The first five days Sarah kept me fast in bed. In those days I certainly heard his step and his voice at intervals about the house, and although his sister never mentioned him directly I was easily convinced that a constant rapport existed between them regarding my care and treatment. I was confident that it was he who prescribed for me through her. However, when I began to come to the table he did not appear. I asked no question regarding him or his movements, as I should have done had I been indifferent to them. I knew he had an office in Boston; I knew he was constantly called long distances away from home in consultation and for difficult surgical operations. His absence was plainly not remarkable or Sarah Kirke would have remarked upon it.

After I was able to go about the house I used to amuse myself with tracing what I fancied might be his household habits, by the books, and

pipes, and papers, the microscopes, the portfolios, the easy chairs. Sarah kept a horrible photograph of him on her chiffonier. I used to make excuses to go into her room that I might glance at this photograph in passing.

But I soon discovered a better source of comfort and of communication with the availing presence of Sarah Kirke's brother. In a straw pocket attached to one great wicker chair I found the small, shabby volume which I used to see oftener than any other book in his hand on shipboard. It was much worn, much marked, much like the man. One day, reading this which follows, I learned the Kirkes' whole theory of spiritual healing:

“A Grief of recent birth is a sick infant that must have its medicine administered in its milk, and sad Thoughts are the sorrowful Heart's natural food. . . . The Soul in her desolation hugs the sorrow close to her as her sole remaining garment; and this must be drawn off so gradually and the garment to be put in its stead so gradually slipt on and feel so like the

former, that the Sufferer shall be sensible of the change only by the refreshment. The true spirit of consolation is well content to detain the tear in the eye, and finds a surer pledge of its success in the smile of Resignation that dawns through that, than in the liveliest shows of a forced and alien exhilaration."

But the deepest word and the divinest was herein:

"We are next to bring out the Divine Portrait itself, the distinct features of its countenance, as a sojourner among men; its benign aspect turned toward its fellow pilgrims, the extended arm and the hand that blesseth and healeth."

These words I pondered often and long. I had seen and known the man of this world both small and great. I had now been brought into touch with another type; the man of God. And behind him I now dimly discerned—the Christ of God.

One day I found a pair of gray dogskin gloves which I recognized lying on a table in a

corner of the hall, a long surgical case with them. I knew they had not been there the day before. The sight of them gave me a strangely agreeable sensation. I could not resist the impulse to take them up in my hands. I even laid my cheek against them, pretending to distinguish the species of skin by the slight characteristic odor. Some one came down the hall and I hurried away feeling like a guilty thing. Sarah was bringing in the letters. As I joined her she took her fountain-pen from its neat little socket (she always carried it at her belt and it was always in order) and began rapidly crossing out the addresses and redirecting them.

“I must forward these to the doctor,” she said carelessly.

I noticed that she wrote Savannah on the envelopes.

“He has run away for a little duck-shooting and exploring in the South,” she added.

“When did he go?” I asked politely.

“He started last night.”

The days passed and my two weeks were

nearly over. Sarah Kirke expressed a quiet satisfaction in my recovery. I could sleep and eat normally; my pulse was comparatively steady; my physical system in reasonably good order; my nervous condition far less disturbed than when I came: all my tangible and local troubles were healed. I had no longer an excuse for not taking up life again. Doubtless Irving needed me, even if he did not greatly desire my presence. At least I must go back to him and to our home. The time was set for a certain Wednesday morning. It was December now. On Tuesday afternoon Sarah Kirke came into the library about four o'clock and found me engaged in carefully arranging a section of the book-shelves which had been out of order. Barbarossa was asleep on the hearth-rug. The room was still.

"I am a good girl," I said, glancing over my shoulder at her with a playful childish challenge for her praise. "See what I am doing!"

"A very good girl," she said nodding, plainly pleased. "I am going out, Sidney"—

she had taken up the habit of calling me thus by name to my infinite comfort—"and I will drive around by your house and see that your maid is there, and leave word that you are coming in the morning."

"And the man can take my trunk to-night. It is quite ready," I returned. Then I thanked her and she went out. I heard the carriage as it was driven down the long garden, and watched it a moment from the nearest window, feeling a lump rising in my throat and a moisture in my eyes. I finished my row of books, getting all the Darwins and after-Darwins into a fine chronological sequence, then, weary of the work, crossed to the hearth-rug and sat down beside Barbarossa, looking into the fire.

The dog lifted his nose from his paws as he felt my arm thrown over his flank, cocked a vaguely troubled eye back at me, decided to indulge me in my somewhat undignified approach, dropped his nose and subsided into revery.

"Bab," I murmured softly, "I wish the master of this house was coming home."

Bab appeared to acquiesce.

“I shall never, never see him any more, you know.”

Bab reflected and found this sad.

“Is he good to you, Bab?”

I was sure I detected an affirmative guttural.

“I thought so. Perhaps he is good to you all the time. Sometimes he is very dreadful and severe to me, and hurts me, Bab, very much. Would you have thought him capable of it?”

Bab made a sudden snap at an imaginary fly which gave the effect of an indignant shake of the head.

I patted his head and fumbled my fingers in the impossible softness of his neck. Then I pressed my forehead against the smooth space between the great, hanging ears and went on.

“But he does it for my good, you know, Bab, and afterward he is rather apt to smile, which, you see, makes you forget. If I were only a dog like you, Friedrich Barbarossa, I would lick his hand. I suppose he would find that rather disagreeable, though. Oh, dear me! He

lets you lick his hand all you want to, you imperial old person. You can lie at his feet and lay your head on his knee and have his hand laid on your head every day of your life. How I hate you for it!"

With this I kissed him between his eyes with effusion, and then, as I thought his mental powers seemed a little exhausted by the strain of so prolonged a conversation, I patted his eyes shut, moved off a bit, and made myself very comfortable lying on the rug with his shaggy back for a pillow.

In these two weeks of dreamy, irresponsible quiet, my married life and all its fever and stress had sunk into the semblance of a dream. Irving, Ross Kimball, the Owens and the rest had lost tenacity and form. They seemed to me sometimes like shadows. Often now I went back to the fancies of my girlhood, farther back indeed. From the fierce and passionate experiences of the last months I had undergone a strong reaction. The old child-heart of me seemed to have come back to life, kindling with

an innocent and cordial fire out of the ashes of shame and despair. To please myself now in my pensive mood, I fell to dreaming such foolish day-dreams as I had fed myself with at twelve, with myself ever as central figure. I was a beauteous (beauteous had always been the word) young creature in long trailing white garments who had wandered into a great forest otherwise known as Darksome Wood, alone save for the magnificent greyhound which followed her adoringly wherever she chose to go, and which she held by a silver chain locked with a tiny key to a bracelet on her fair wrist. B. C. (Beauteous Creature), being weary (on no account tired), soon gave over exploring the forest, and with a gesture commanded the dog to throw himself at her feet. Then she sank gracefully on the mossy ground, pillowed her head (this I had always thought neat) on the smooth shoulder of the Faithful Dog and had straightway gone to sleep. Naturally he guarded her slumber in motionless adoring silence; naturally also her golden hair fell in glittering profusion

over his body and her graceful limbs were elegantly concealed by the silken folds of her drapery. I remember smiling to myself at this point as I regarded my rough, short, homespun skirt, my own lengthy limbs and by no means small feet stretched frankly on the Shirvan rug arrayed in thick-soled, mannish boots of the "bulldog" variety. But never mind, it was all very nice. Barbarossa had gone to sleep again with blinking at the fire, and I was deliciously drowsy. So the B. C. slept on; her blue-veined lids concealing her glorious eyes, the long lashes sweeping the delicate bloom of her cheeks, when lo! at precisely the right moment, enters the Hero—obviously a Gallant Knight, else what would he have been doing in a Darksome Wood?—dismounts in a pleasing manner from his own, his Arab steed, and approaching B. C. stands spellbound at her entrancing loveliness.

Suddenly without faintest warning the Faithful Dog who had thus far submissively tolerated my head upon his shaggy hide, sprang to his feet with a mighty motion, hurling my head from its

resting-place without the smallest ceremony, dashed to the library door, whining, barking, and scraping at it in a fury of excitement. Before I had had time to scramble to my feet the door was opened and Dr. Kirke stepped into the room, restraining Bab with one hand and, as he perceived my presence, holding out the other to me.

Gladness and confusion held an instant's high carnival with me as I shook myself into shape and returned his greeting, my lips saying not even a word, my eyes saying perhaps too much.

The Doctor gave me a chair by the fire and drew up another for himself, and I stared childishly to see what a different air he wore at his own fireside and that he did not choose for himself the chair I had always silently counted his and hence preferred. Bab established himself firmly and without a moment's delay close before his master's knees, gazing with wistful worship into his rugged face, his eyes pleading for the attention they did not get while the Doc-

tor talked to me. Yes, he had returned early in the morning, he had been busy in Boston all day. He had had a pleasant trip; the weather had been good; I was looking better, he thought; he was glad the change had resulted so well; his sister had told him by telephone in the morning that I was about leaving.

Then lights were brought and Sarah Kirke came home and we had dinner, and after dinner it was the fireside again, with fresh logs and great flames roaring up the chimney. We talked of our shipboard life and of the sea and what we loved best oversea; of architecture, of music and poetry and the masters of each. Portfolios were brought and rich collections looked over and talked over. As always with these two people I found repose and healing. Life seemed worthy, deep, bountiful, sane and strong. In the morning I went home, knowing not what should await me. With me went the little leather-bound "Aids to Reflection." Dr. Kirke had discovered that I liked it. He insisted that I should borrow it for a year.

XXIII

I was glad that I was permitted to go home alone.

It was like Sarah Kirke not to insist on going with me. She never fussed, never overdid a thing.

I unlocked my own door and entered the silent house. Everything looked strange and foreign to my eyes for a moment. All seemed on a tiny scale and I was struck by a patchiness of effect. So many small objects seemed to tease the eye and challenge attention and comment. I saw what I had never seen before, that my house lacked repose. Still, it was my own, and on the whole it pleased me.

Or was it perhaps not my own now? Irving had written me that the sale of which he had made mention would probably be effected. I had given my consent.

No one had marked my entrance, and I walked through into the dining-room. The table was laid daintily for lunch for two. Then Irving would come home to-day to meet me. A sense of pleasure quickened my pulse a little. There were beautiful roses in a bowl on the table. Perhaps Irving had sent them to mark and welcome my return. I recognized them, however, in a moment as having come from the greenhouse of the Kirkes. Doubtless Sarah had brought them yesterday. I came back into the library. It had a cheerless, littered air. I glanced over the papers on the table. Many of them I found were railroad publications, all of Southern routes. A large tissue map of Florida lay outspread. Newspapers were piled everywhere. Does a man never destroy a newspaper? One I noticed was skulking, half hidden, under the lounge. I bent and drew it out, glancing at the date. It was an evening paper, ten days old, left fallen, no doubt, where Irving had dropped it after first reading, and later pushed a little out of sight. As I crossed to my desk to throw

the paper into the large waste-basket a headline caught my eye: "Reports of G. Ross Kimball's Ill Health Without Foundation. Interview of a Reporter for the Evening —— with the Eminent Financier." My eyes were irresistibly drawn to the column. I read the entire paragraph. It was as follows:

"The Evening —— is glad to be able to announce authoritatively that the rumors persistently circulated recently in certain quarters regarding the alleged physical disability of Mr. G. Ross Kimball, the famous railroad operator and multimillionaire, are gross exaggerations. Whether these reports have arisen from the overanxiety of Mr. Kimball's friends, or through the effort of speculators who wished to influence the money market, the Evening —— does not attempt to determine. But a representative of this journal called upon Mr. Kimball at his palatial residence this afternoon, and was received by Mr. Kimball himself. The interview took place in the magnificent private library of the great capitalist. This apartment

forms the lower portion of the west wing tower, and in its interior decoration the genius of Mr. Hook, the distinguished New York architect, has perhaps reached its climax.

“The writer was received most graciously by Mr. Kimball. The distinguished citizen certainly showed no signs of failing health. The extent of his illness has been a sharp attack of grippe which has confined him for a short time to the house. He will not give himself to affairs of business for at least two or three days longer.

“It is hard for Mr. Kimball to do nothing and during his brief recess from public business he is occupying himself with designs for a superb chancel window which he proposes to bestow upon St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church, in this city, of which he is, as is well known, a communicant and earnest supporter. The representative of the Evening ——— was favored with a view of the drawings in question, which prefigure a surpassing effect when carried into execution.”

I had hardly had time to toss the paper away

before I heard Irving coming in. He kissed me with much tenderness, and seemed exceedingly relieved at finding me so much myself. I thought him looking badly, and questioned him affectionately regarding his health, which he admitted was "off." The habitudes of marital courtesy and kindness tided us over the first difficult bar. We sat down to luncheon with some sense of pale and sober happiness. But the house was sold, Irving told me. He had brought the deed home for me to sign. Luncheon over, Irving, who seemed to have no intention of going back to his office, sat down with me in the library and called my attention to the various maps and railroad circulars which were lying about.

"We must face the question now squarely, of what to do next," he said, the lines of care deepening visibly, I thought, in his face.

"What are you considering most?" I asked. "I judge it must be to go South."

"Yes," and he drew the map of Florida nearer to him and bent over it. "Dr. Kirke ad-

vises me to try the South, and especially Florida, for the next few years. The only reason for not going is that he says I shall probably live a good deal longer if we go down there than if we remain here. The distance from Boston is to my mind a great thing in favor. The farther we go from where we are known the better."

I choked down a sigh, but made no comment on the bitter weakness of his words. Twisted in with the pain they gave me was another thread. Dr. Kirke, it seemed, wanted to send us away as far and as soon as possible.

"And Dr. Kirke really advised Florida?" I asked with persistent if hard-won cheerfulness.

"Yes, he has spent a week down there, looking into the thing for me."

I gave an exclamation of surprise shot through with sudden understanding of that unexplained absence.

"How could he leave his practise? I know how busy he is; I understand, you see, better now how hard he has to work."

“Oh, it did him good to get away,” returned Irving coolly. “It’s a good time of year to take a little run like that.”

Plainly the sense of obligation which touched me instantly as acute was not so to Irving. He always congratulated himself, I remembered, on getting a good thing for small outlay. Hiding the distaste which the thought awakened I said: “Well, tell me the results of his prospecting tour. Did he bring back anything definite?”

“Yes. Sit over here. Let me show you on this map.”

Irving then proceeded to set forth the many considerations in favor of our establishing ourselves permanently in Borromeo, near the east coast. We could come north perhaps, if we could afford it, for the hottest months, but this would be our home. He would go in for his profession; the place was large enough to give him something to do perhaps in that way, and he would invest a part of the proceeds of the sale of the house in an orange-grove. This he could work to some extent himself. Kirke said noth-

ing could be better for his health than that kind of outdoor occupation. Of course, we should necessarily have to curtail our style of living, perhaps do without a maid altogether if I were well enough. I instantly expressed my unqualified willingness to accept this part of the situation.

“ You may think you will like it now, at this distance,” Irving said drily, “ but you may not like it as well when you come to the actual thing. However, Kirke says people live very simply down there, use lots of tinned things, you know, and you can always get the colored people to come in on a pinch and help.”

“ And the Doctor thinks this location especially desirable?” I asked, my heart sinking more and more as I saw more clearly what definite shape the plan was assuming.

I wondered vaguely why I felt this unspeakable oppression. It certainly would be a relief to get away from the associations of the past few months. Why was not Borromeo as good a place as any other?

But there was a cowardice in running away which I felt sharply. One question I would and must ask Dr. Kirke.

"Yes," Irving replied; "he says it is a really live little place for a Southern town and the climate is perfect—no malaria, which you know is remarkable for Florida. He has even looked up the matter of a house, and thinks he has perhaps found the right thing."

"Really?" I asked, tears piercing my eyes. Dr. Kirke was so kind, and so in earnest to get us away! Perhaps he was getting a little tired of such a very exacting pair of people, always making some astonishing demand upon his generosity and patience. I knew he would not pack us off to Florida on that account, but I could not wonder if he should find it a rest when we were fairly off his hands.

Irving had stopped to sketch with swift, skilful pencil a ground plan, consisting of a broad veranda and three rooms, a living room, bedroom and kitchen.

"There," he said, placing it in my hand:

“that will give you the notion as well as Kirke could remember. It is just a cabin, you see, no cellar, no lath and plaster. Just the three rooms with a garret over. Think you could live in it, Sidney? You see there are almost no houses to be had in Borromeo after this time of year.”

“Oh, we could make it very nice and cozy, I am sure. But what should we do with all our furniture?” and I glanced about at the beautiful massive old mahogany pieces, my mother’s pride and my own.

“Sell the ones we can bring ourselves to part with; store or lend these things of your mother’s. Take with us just enough of your simplest and least expensive things—a few chairs and tables, a bed and a bureau and a set of dishes. In short, strip life down to its bare bones, Sidney. It will be a kind of colorless, fleshless thing, like that,” and he held out his hand, grown sadly thin, in a forlorn, spiritless gesture.

“When do we give possession of this house?” I asked.

“The first of January.”

"When could we have that other house, the one in Borromeo, if we should decide to go there?"

"The first of January. Kirke took a refusal of it for a fortnight. I shall wire them tonight if you think we had better take it. Of course, you could take a day longer to decide. This is the seventh of December——"

"I think probably you would better wire. You and Dr. Kirke know much better than I possibly can. You and he think it is best?"

"There is no best, you know, Sidney, any more for us. Whatever we do will be tough for both of us."

"Yes, I see." I was finding what it means for a man to lose his grip.

"You think, do you, that you could manage to pack up and all in three weeks? I have got Miss Webster's promise to come for a week and help you if we decide. But of course the time is short."

"I like it better to be short. The shorter the better. I can not bear living long in confusion.

The place is not ours any more. We don't belong here. We don't belong anywhere."

"I guess that's right."

"See, there is Christmas. Where shall we take our Christmas dinner? In a restaurant, I suppose."

"It will have to be a cheap one," Irving answered with a hard little laugh.

"All I ask is," I said now, thinking hard and fast, "that you will let me take until six o'clock to decide. Will that give you time for your telegraphing?"

"Oh, yes. If you don't take any longer than that it will be doing very well."

With this Irving brought out a newspaper and threw himself on the lounge to read.

I went slowly up-stairs. On the way my decision was reached. I went to the telephone and called for Sarah Kirke's number. One of the maids, whose voice I recognized, responded. Miss Kirke was out. Was the Doctor there or would he be in soon? No. He was not expected to dinner to-night. She would call up the Bos-

ton office and find whether he was out of town.

After a short interval she repeated the information she had gained. Dr. Kirke was not out of town, but his movements were uncertain. He might possibly be in the office during the afternoon. He was not there at the time.

I rested a half hour, then dressed for the street and the snowstorm, the first of the season, the kind of storm I used to love when I was happy and strong. The car took me within a block of Dr. Kirke's town office. It was the first time I had ever visited it. My heart beat with unreasonable rapidity as I opened the door and entered. I found it very much as I imagined; soberly handsome, dignified, orderly, well-appointed. The Doctor was not there. Two or three tired-looking souls were waiting for him in the reception-room. I went out after a little, too restless to remain seated staring between these people and being stared at by them. For the first time it occurred to me to feel an interest in my appearance—to know what I had come

to look like after the tempest and earthquake. It was the first time I had ventured out from under shelter, so to say. I strayed into a large store and presently passed a mirror. I stood and looked at myself with deliberation, a little startled at my very marked pallor. My eyes had grown larger and darker, it seemed, but still more I marveled at the change of expression, elusive, yet sure. Something was not there which used to be. Something which used to belong to my face had been burnt and purged away. Was it the Lilith of me?

I walked for an hour in the whirling snow-storm, thinking so to gain vigor and quicker circulation. Then I came back to Dr. Kirke's office. It was lighted now I perceived. I stepped in with a peculiar timidity, an annoying trepidation through all my limbs and a fluttering at my heart, and yet I had beneath all this perturbation of the nerves a firm and unshaken spirit and purpose. It was not strange that my nerves were insurgent, since undeniably I was, as I always had been, afraid, ridiculously afraid of Dr. Kirke.

I found no one in the reception office, but the page said the Doctor would probably see me soon and withdrew. Hearing voices proceeding evidently from an inner office door, as of some person about taking leave, I did not seat myself but crossed to the center of the room and stood resting one hand on a table there, when the door leading through a small passage to the inner office was opened and a man entered the room. My face was turned directly toward him. It was Ross Kimball.

XXIV

THE shock was extreme, or so, at least, to me. It occurred to me mysteriously, for I hardly lifted my eyes to his face, that Ross Kimball was less surprised than I at this encounter. The adroit by-play with which I had of old become so familiar, of following my movements from point to point, and, in the end, meeting me, apparently by pure accident, suddenly flashed before my memory.

We stood confronting one another of necessity since I would not retreat and could not advance until summoned to enter the inner office, and he did not choose to proceed on his way out. A slight change was obscurely perceptible in his face, a muscular relaxing. He greeted me with marked courtesy, extending his hand, which I did not notice. I felt rather than saw the old ironical smile of unruffled composure, even of secret amusement, at my consternation.

"It is a great pleasure to see you out again, an immense relief," he said, and bent toward me, his courtliness and grace rather augmented by the strain of the situation than disturbed.

My eyes were fixed on the solid oak door beyond him. Would it never open?

"You have given us profound anxiety, Mrs. Lloyd, and your world has been sadly ennuyé without you. Do not keep us waiting much longer."

The consummate hypocrisy of these words filled me with a sudden blaze of anger. Fiery flames of it seemed to vibrate around me where I stood, and I looked straight into the face of the man before me with its semblance of delicate devotion, its insulting homage.

Perhaps Ross Kimball had not often met a look in which lay no faintest lurking of compromise, of yielding before him, or of fear. His eyelids fell, then rose again, and his eyes swept me with one swift passing glance of untutored savage sincerity, the strangest glance I ever encountered; so fraught with the passion of vin-

dictive anger, and with what he could have called the passion of love. He was in that instant at once the seducer and the avenger.

"Pardon me," he murmured under his breath, moving past me. Then the door opened, the page made a motion that I was expected, and I passed through into the consulting room, trembling from head to foot, my breath almost failing me.

Dr. Kirke was sitting in a substantial arm-chair before a substantial desk, his head in profile bent slightly forward as he wrote rapidly in a notebook before him. I had closed the door and stepped nearly to the desk before he glanced up and perceived who had entered. Taken un-awares, without time for reflection or control, light leaped into his face. He sprang from his chair with the exclamation—"You!" into which a whole world's significance seemed concentrated, and drew me with one strong unpremeditated movement as if to gather me to his heart.

It was not done before it was undone. He had marked the terror in my face and the

tremor in my limbs, at the first glance. Doubtless that explained his involuntary gesture. I found myself in another instant laid in a deep Morris chair, with salts held at my nostrils and a window open near my head through which the good cold wind blew lustily.

“I am not going to faint,” I said, compassing a smile.

“You may if you want to,” he said indulgently. “It will do no harm.” Then as my color and strength came swiftly back he suddenly exclaimed—

“Did that reptile dare to speak to you, Sidney?”

I nodded without speaking, finding it in no wise strange that he called me by name unconsciously.

I looked up into his heavily lined face, the powerful molding of the features, the deeply sagged eyes, glowing with a sudden fire under the craglike brow, the sudden unwonted paling of the skin. This was an angry man too. But the anger of that other had been assault; this

man's wrath was protection. Irving had not been angry at all in my behalf, although he had snarled at my imprudence. Dr. Kirke actually roared in an outburst of fierce and uncontrollable indignation.

"God!" I heard him say, and not in imprecation, "what did I save that man's life for? Oh, let him die! One devil is enough."

I cried quietly while he raged a little longer. What it meant I could not fathom, for how could he know? But at least he knew enough to pity and protect me, to despise and abhor the man who had slain my fair name and would have sunk my body and soul in hell if he had had his way.

Presently calmness fell.

"There, that will do. Don't cry any more," the Doctor said abruptly, taking a seat beside me and looking at his watch. "There is no more time for emotions; I have to take a train at five thirty. What is it?"

"I came to ask you one question, Dr. Kirke, and I am in a hurry too," and I sat up with sud-

den energy. "It is about this going South. I want to know whether we are going down there on account of Irving's health really and sincerely, and because it is necessary. Or whether we are running away like cowards because we have an enemy here who is driving us out and whom we are afraid of."

The Doctor looked fixedly at me with compressed lips, his head dropped slightly forward. His powerful physiognomy was all the physician's now. His eyes were clear of passion. After a perceptible pause he said,

"It is necessary for you to go. That is clear. We have got to do something for Irving's health. He is losing ground perceptibly as things are now, and his nervous exhaustion reacts unfavorably upon his heart action. Conditions here will inevitably increase this depression. It is highly important to get him away, and Florida is a pretty good place on the whole, because he can live outdoors and potter about in an orange-grove until he is stronger. His lungs are none too good either, I find. But with

the change he may have the best of his life still before him."

"Very well," I said gravely, rising as I spoke; "I am willing to go for Irving's sake; there is nothing I could not do for that. But I flatly refuse to go for fear of Ross Kimball. He has done his worst already."

"You can never be sure of that," said Dr. Kirke, advancing to open the door for me. "It is much better for you both to be away from here."

"And better for you to have us go," I said a little sadly. "We have been an unmerciful bother to you."

He had come out through the reception-room beside me and opened the outer door for my exit. He made no response for an instant, but the gravity of his face deepened even to melancholy.

"Yes, it will be better, as you say—better for me. Good afternoon."

I came out upon the street, caught my car, and reached home just before six o'clock. Dr.

Kirke had agreed only too easily that it was better for him that we should go. But this ready, unprotesting assent gave my heart no painful tumult, but rather a ground swell of nameless joy.

"Is that you, Sidney?" Irving called from the dusky depths of the library when I came into the house.

"Your time is nearly up. Have you come to a decision?"

"Yes," I responded. "Let us take the house in Borromeo, Irving. I am ready. Nobody needs us here. It will be better for every one that we should go."

The next morning I began with a will the sorting over of boxes and drawers with a view to the change of abode. I caught myself singing a snatch of song and deep in my breast there seemed a measureless content. I did not seek to find its source, but a sense of a silent, homely man with a watch-dog faithfulness and threatening, somber eyes, standing in my defense, never left me. It has never left me yet, waking or sleeping.

It was about ten o'clock, I think, when my maid brought me a white box, satin smooth, ribbon-bound, from which I drew an enormous bunch of English violets. There was no card. The room was instantly pervaded with their fragrance. Delighted I hung over them, enjoying their color and sweet earthy odor. Who could have sent them to me? I never had flowers nowadays save from the Kirkes. These did not look like Sarah in the least, and as for the Doctor, he would be as likely to send me French novels and bonbons. There was nothing Kirkesque about that sumptuous ribbon-bound box. Suddenly the thought darted through my mind that it had come from Ross Kimball. I knew it then by intuition beyond further doubt. He chose quietly to ignore my anger, my repudiation, to meet my resistance and my scorn with amused forbearance. Whatever had been his previous intention, on seeing me he had resolved to set his siege again in action, believing that in my poverty, my humiliation, my obvious physical weakness, I would yet yield. Thus

would both passion and revenge find sufficient satisfaction. Yes, he would first caress and then destroy. I walked straight to the window, then threw it open and flung the violets down on the snowy pavement below, turned back with a scornful lip and went on with my work. The box I broke between my hands and threw into a heap of rubbish which was mounting into proportions on the floor, the refuse of my morning's work.

A few moments later I was impelled to go to the window and look down. The violets still lay untouched and untrodden on the pavement—a superb patch of color on the snow. There was little passing on our quiet street at this time of day. But as I looked some one was approaching, a young man with a plodding step, a pinched face, a shabby coat. I had seen him pass often—he lived on a narrow street beyond ours—a clerk on meager wages at best and probably out of work altogether now. He would not be going down street at this hour if he were employed. He had an invalid mother at home, I

had heard. He stopped, seeing the violets lying in the snow, picked them up quickly, then stood a moment looking up and down the street. No one was in sight. Slowly a smile of incredulous delight came into his face. He wrapped the violets tenderly in his handkerchief, faced about and hurried back toward home with a quick, elastic step.

I watched him out of sight, and my eyes grew dim. I knelt then as I did sometimes of late, albeit shyly and as one unused to God, and prayed that out of all that was wrong and unclean love and joy might come to somebody, somewhere. My heart seemed touched to music. I had elected religion.

XXV

At first I think our prevailing sense in our new abode in Borromeo was of its temporary character. It was a tent in the wilderness; a hospice in which we had taken a passing refuge from a great storm; a wayside inn which gave us its simple and friendly shelter in our time of wandering. Gradually, however, the sense that we were camping out wore away, and in six months I believe Irving and I felt that this poor cabin was in a real sense our home.

The house stood on the outskirts of the town, on a street of somewhat dubious existence, laid out as it was, amid drifting sand and the harsh, scanty grass, into which it altogether lapsed farther on. Beyond were a few tall pines which we loved, and still beyond, on the level horizon line, lay the sea. The salt spray reached us when the wind blew from the east. The house stood up in ugly nakedness on four corner-

posts, and was built of pine, painted a mercifully dull green outside, and not at all within. But it was perfectly new, we being its first inmates, and it was fresh and clean and sweet. The living-room, into which the house door opened, was severely simple, but by no means uninviting, with its big rude chimney-piece and its windows looking seaward. We had brought one good rug with us, a box of books, a few favorite pictures, and the lounge and a few chairs from the home library. All were in this room and besides a small rack of shelves for china and a round oak dining-table of modest size, which served alike for our meals and our magazines, since this was dining-room as well as hall, parlor and library. The kitchen was equipped with an oil-stove, a cupboard, a table and two chairs. The sleeping-room was furnished with equal simplicity.

Irving felt the lack of luxury, beauty and comfort more than I, but he made a serious occupation of living out of doors, and the orange grove which he laid out and planted be-

hind the house absorbed much of his time and attention.

We were now in the ranks of honest poverty, not simply so by comparison with people of wealth, but actually and undeniably, since all that we possessed outside the orange grove and house produced but a few hundred dollars of interest as income. My chief responsibility settled into two prime factors: the routine of a very careful housekeeping, in which I was myself housekeeper and maid-of-all-work, and the conscientious care of Irving's health. Dr. Kirke had instructed me carefully regarding his weak points, his tendencies and his needs. These last were in the main sunshine, pure air and to be in it all the time, sleeping even on the veranda when possible; pure water; an abundance of varied and nourishing food; a complete absence of all excitement, worry and nervous stimulation.

From the moment when I had perceived, on that darkest day of our wedded lives, that Irving had no firm, essential faith in my faithful-

ness, and that compromise on my part with Ross Kimball's dishonorable gallantries would have been more easily condoned by him than absolute repulse—from that moment he had ceased to be my husband according to the vital and inner law of the spirit. He remained now and hereafter my husband only by the law of the outer commandment, of duty, obligation and sworn faith. I experienced no resentment, but something infinitely deeper and more sorrowful in this hidden moral readjustment. My husband became my ward, my charge, the object of all my life's devotion, which could never, I felt, atone for the irreparable injury my reckless dallying with temptation had brought down upon his head. All the more because the inner and spiritual bond, weak perhaps at best, was severed now, did my diligence fail in no smallest scruple in the external loyalty. I watched his face with a nurse's eyes, listened to his breathing while he slept, studied the caprices of his taste and appetite. I bore as my just penance the frequent fits of despondence, the cheer-

less fretting over small details, the spiritless repining, the thinly veiled reproaches which had become habitual to him, brought out in startling evidence by adversity, as an obscure design in a fabric is sometimes brought out by turning it into shadow. Irving had lost his grip, largely through my fault. I alone could bear with him now, could seek to comfort, cheer and uphold. That I did this humbly, without wrath or doubting, I, with my proud, passionate and impatient nature, was due to what the old phraseology calls "divine grace." Surely never was there a sweeter phrase nor an apter.

We made a few friends in Borromeo. We did not want many. Chief among these was a young Episcopal rector named Loring, a gallant young Knight of the Holy Grail, who had seen the Vision and set out on the Quest and had thus far suffered no loss of his fine illusions. For this I loved him, I who had lived so long without the Vision, and Irving cared for him because he was a gentleman, because he could lend and borrow books with intelligent en-

thusiasm, and would sometimes go a-fishing, in the non-apostolic sense.

Sometimes there would come a morning when these two would start off together to be gone the day and perhaps the to-morrow also. I would fill their straw knapsacks with substantial food, daintily prepared, for Irving's eye must always be won before his appetite; would watch them then as they strode through the sand, toward the sea, until they turned into the strip of pine wood and were lost to sight. Then I would drop into my hammock or my deck-chair on the veranda and all my being would relax, eye and brain, nerve and limb, hand and heart. All day I would lie like that, the morning cares over, for my dinner would be a bowl of bread and milk, my supper fruit and bread from a plate held in my hand. And so, as I watched the sea through the silent hours, the high tide of love would come pouring in, sweeping up through every bare inlet and creek and bay and drowning out from memory and consciousness all things save itself.

The man who had said he loved me and did not, but lusted after me, had said that I was incapable of love, that I would never forget myself in a great emotion. I partly believed him then. Now I knew better, for in days like these, when duty and penance seemed for a little space put by, self and sense were clean forgotten, and I companied solely with memories of the man who had believed in me, the man who had lifted me up, who had been my pilot through the storm. That he, who could be infinitely gentle, could also be as rough and rugged as the storm itself, made him but the more adorable. In all the superficial love affairs which I had known I had loved love, the being loved, the excitement of the amorous and egotistic instinct. Now at last, at thirty, I experienced for the first time the majesty and the mastery of a mortal passion, and now at last I loved my lover, witnessing anew to the trenchant maxim of La Rochefoucauld. Albeit for proof that the man I worshiped *was* my lover, I had nothing beyond an involuntary gesture, a single word, a doubtful phrase with

barest chance of a hidden meaning, and—persistent, unremitting avoidance. Meager material indeed with which to build, but I was meek enough now not to ask for more. I am not sure that I wanted Dr. Kirke to love me, since love would only mean for him perpetual renunciation. I only asked to love him. This I dared to do, I, Irving's wife, and believed it did me no scathe, since this love in its essence was wholly spiritual, not carnal. If an angel from Heaven had rebuked me, calling it a "guilty love," I should have faced him with an unflinching *Retro mihi*. I knew it for the love which purified, not that which defiled.

As the months passed we settled more and more into our quiet life, and felt it not too simple after all. As Irving grew stronger he grew less irritable and despondent, and we had various forms of sunshine in our homely cabin. He began to take hold of the common life of Borromeo with a certain interest, to identify himself with the ambitious little town. Finding him ready to stand less aloof the townspeople

began to seek him out, drawn to him as people always were by his personal elegance and distinction, his very marked refinement and unobtrusive culture, and perhaps yet more by the pathos of the melancholy in his face, so much more marked I saw sadly of late, in spite of all my contrite ministration.

All this was very good for Irving, and his health improved steadily. He decided to open an office as architect in the central street of Borromeo. Some little work came his way which we both enjoyed greatly, although the financial return was inconsiderable. We found it necessary that spring to draw somewhat heavily upon the principal which we had invested, since an orange-grove is bound to be an arch-consumer for a few years before it can become a producer. Still we were not seriously troubled by this, especially when we were able to economize more closely as Irving's firmer health permitted.

When the summer heats came on we were brave at first to bear them, to compare records,

and declare one day and another of a temperature far lower than we had often known in Massachusetts. But as I watched him through July I saw that Irving drooped again under the continuous, unintermitting weight of humid heat. With hardly a day for deliberation, he started North, protesting much, but driven forth by my inflexible determination and my audacious assurance that I could make up the expense in some way. Oh, I knew ways! there was no need to worry. I packed his dress suit in his trunk and told him of it only as he was leaving.

“Go in for a gay good time, dear. You will be wanted everywhere; accept invitations; it will do you good.”

And so it proved. Irving's letters came back filled with very frank and manifest delight in the welcome he found waiting. He met it first of all in New York, where he ventured to call upon Mr. Hook, the architect. He had found him in and delighted to see him. He had praised his work on the Kimball house most generously.

He had spoken of our coming eventually to settle in New York; had as good as said that he could put plenty of business in his way if he should decide to do so. Then it had been home, and to the old clubs and haunts. "By Jove, Sidney," he wrote, "it almost seems as if everything we suffered and feared had been a monstrous delusion. The whole flurry is over now and forgotten. I never had such a royal welcome. All the men who were in town seem bent on treating me like a foreign prince. You never saw anything like it. Every one comments on my looks. They say I have grown so muscular and vigorous. And they all ask for you and seem so anxious to have you come back—why, I have yards of invitations for visits for you. I saw Kirke yesterday and told him what a grand nurse you had turned out. Of course, he didn't say anything. You know he never does, but he seemed pleased I thought. Sometimes it makes my eyes dim when I think how my poor girl felt herself sent to Coventry here less than a year ago. I know everybody who fell in with

that sort of thing is dead ashamed of it now. The Kimballs, thank Heaven! are in Alaska. I wish they would stay there. Never mind, maybe we'll come back some time, after the grove gets to bearing, and hold up our heads again with the rest. What if we could even buy back the dear old house! I passed it yesterday, and threw a kiss up to your window."

Irving returned to Borromeo in October, looking brown and hearty. I had a fine surprise for him. I was teaching in the Academy, having taken a position a month before at a very fair salary. I liked the work and found I could do it as well as not. Our housekeeping was so very simple, and easier than ever if Irving were in good appetite and condition. He demurred vigorously at first, but I convinced him that the teaching was perfectly manageable for me. Soon I perceived that secretly it was an immense relief to him. He had found money fairly melting away while he was North, and had been forced to ravage his bank account. You couldn't turn around without handing out

a dollar, he said, and of course you couldn't air your poverty before the men in the clubs and the fellows who took you to their houses.

"It will be all right, dear," I assured him confidently. "Didn't I tell you I knew a way?"

XXVI

DECEMBER again. Two years since we came first to Borromeo. It is a raw and windy night with frequent gusts of chilly rain; twilight is falling early.

I have remained late at the schoolhouse, for the holidays are near at hand, and much extra work is involved by an approaching Christmas festival. I have no need to hurry home, for no one will be waiting for me there. I set out for my mile walk, my netted bag of books and exercises to be corrected during the evening hanging from my arm. It is a lonely walk, and the twilight in which I start will be dusk ere I reach home.

A year ago when I took this same walk I used not to take it alone, for Irving would always meet me somewhere on the way, often at the schoolhouse door, and we would stride on

together like the good comrades in the folk-song. Kind and dear Irving had been all the winter long, and was growing dearer. We thought, too, ever stronger. It had been a happy winter, bringing fresh heart and hope to both of us and clean, honest work and wages, without fear or favor of any man. But in March Irving had not seemed so strong. His work tired him, and he was discouraged by the great "freeze" which ruined half of his young trees, just fairly started after long tending. It was hard to have to be away from him then through the hours of school, but it could not be helped. Our resources had been so drained that now the interest had dwindled to a pitifully small amount, and if I broke off Irving could not have the costly food he craved and required. I must teach long hours every day. I do not know always how those days were spent in March, when the weather was bleak and depressing, and he could not go beyond the narrow walls of the little house. I know they must have been drearily monotonous with such scant resources as were at our

disposal, but he made no complaint. There were so many people in Borromeo who had much the same languid tediousness to bear, so many who had been worsted in life, moreover. I think Irving came to feel that he was not the most cruelly buffeted of men. Mr. Loring was our best friend and standby. All through that last month he went very often during school hours and played cribbage, which he despised, with Irving, talked and read with him and kept up his spirits.

The thing which happened at last was what none of us had yet foreseen. It was early in April. We were fearing for his lungs, as he coughed at night and lost flesh perceptibly; the slow wasting of consumption was ever before my eyes as a thing which might follow. But it was not to be. Swift and sudden a heart seizure came upon him in the early morning when we were quite alone. I used all the measures and medicines with which Dr. Kirke had provided me, called a neighbor, when I could leave for a moment, and sent for a physician and Mr.

Loring. Even then Irving was unconscious, and the end came very soon.

We did not talk of going North for the burial. There was no money for such a journey nor any motive power. My work and my home were in Borromeo; the people had loved Irving here and they loved me also. So we laid him that spring morning in the quiet Southern cemetery, with a great live oak bending near as if in yearning, while from afar palm-trees lifted their branches to the sky for victory. I used before that to wonder that women went to the graves of their dead to weep there; it seemed, I had thought, a weak, faint-hearted, faithless clinging to the clay. I shall never think that again. Irving had become like my son rather than my husband in that last year of tenderness and devotion. A mother does not expect her son to be faultless, as the wife does her husband; she knows all, and her love can sustain all. And so, as a mother yearns over the grave of her child, I yearned over the grave of my husband with outgoing, faithful tenderness, and for his sake and the

beauty which he so longed for everywhere, I made it beautiful with flowers. People were wonderfully kind, and Mr. Loring mourned with me sincerely and with a sufficing sympathy, which I was by no means minded to reject. For mine was not a comfortless or a consuming grief, although it held its own unnamable anguish. I took up my life and went on with it quite simply. It was needful that I should work, and my place in the Academy awaited me. I found that I was still clear in mind, and sound in body; equal to my task now so sadly simplified. All those who knew me urged that I should not live alone, but I knew that alone I was best content.

As the months passed I began to find a quite indescribable satisfaction in the life I lived, its simplicity, its monotony, its very poverty. I dwelt now day by day with the two supreme lords of life—Love and Death, and I was spiritualized and purified by their companionship.

In my girlhood and in the years following I had been deeply if delicately sensuous. Per-

fume, color, texture, food must be of exquisite and elaborate refinement, and in them all I reveled in a kind of languid ecstasy. I had been an idolater, an idolater of my own body, an idolatry so subtle yet so gross that fire-worship becomes sublime in comparison.

Now I had no personal luxuries beyond a portable bath and abundance of clean linen; a book, an easy chair, a rose or a spray of jessamine; I wore the simplest and most unadorned of clothing both outer and inner; my fare was wholesome, but of the cheapest; my day was that of a working woman going forth to her labor until sunset; my house, my bed, my board were solitary. Such a life would once have seemed to me as intolerable as the life of a convict or a miner, but into it I now infused the same ardor which in the old days I had infused into the life of material luxury. I was enamored of poverty and chastity, of my austere solitude, my ascetic and ordered severity of life. Like a draught of cold pure water this discipline seemed to quench the restless fever in my spirit.

I sought to adopt the practise of good deeds, as it belonged essentially now to my scheme of things, but involuntarily heart and flesh cried out that these might not assume the shape of taking into my house some alien creature, however deserving, who would bring disorder and discord into its simple low-toned harmony.

It will be perceived, therefore, that to-night as I walk homeward alone in my black gown and small black bonnet, tied widow-wise below my chin, the rain and wind beating into face and eyes, the twilight deepening around me, I am not heavy-hearted, acutely lonely and unhappy, or altogether to be pitied.

Never in my days of "virgin liberty" has my step been firmer or more elastic. My physical health is perfect, and many of my spiritual wounds are healed. So I come within sight of my small dark cabin with the shading of the low grove of young trees behind, and the sparse faded grass before and presently I am aware that a red spark of light is moving slowly and evenly back and forth along the narrow strip of

walk leading up to the veranda step. A moment later I can discern through the dim dusk a man's form. Some one is waiting for me then.

A nameless dread and danger, the possibility of which never quite leaves me, pierces through my thoughts, and I stand still where I am, in the rain.

Could this be the man I fear most? Can it be Ross Kimball come again to pursue and to besiege me in my defenselessness?

My heart beats violently, my breath quickens, but I start on again. A moment more must decide. At least I will not play the coward without cause. When I reach my gate the stranger stands, his back to the darkness of the veranda, and seeing me comes with deliberate step down the walk. My hand is taken in a strong and reassuring grasp.

XXVII

“DR. KIRKE!”

(Joy, be merciful and stay thy hand!)

“Yes, the Doctor, come once more to torment you! Tell me that I have not begun by frightening you. It never occurred to me that I might have a ghoulish air, lurking like this about your door.”

“Not now, since I have seen your face.”

“It was not to have been dark, you see, when you appeared. You take an unmercifully long time to come from that Academy. I have paced your hurricane deck since five o'clock.”

“How dreadful, and you must have been so long on the way.”

“Yes, two years. But they have not been as long as this last hour.”

“It must have been most discouraging.”

“I thought I had timed things particularly

well, supposing five o'clock the time when all good Christian teachers sought their own abodes."

"God rest ye merry gentleman, not at Christmas time! Will you come in? The door is open now."

"Perhaps you would better go first. I am a little afraid of the dark."

The sputter of a match was held in the Doctor's hand. I hastened in before him, lifted the porcelain globe from the lamp on the table, and there was light. Pine sticks were laid ready across the andirons with slivers of pine below. I touched them with a match and presently the flames of a hearth fire curled upward, a puff of fragrant piny smoke issuing into the room.

"Ah, what a capital place you have made of it! It is amazing, remembering it as I saw it first. But I foresaw this too, in part. Given a fireplace and a woman——"

"Yes. But please take off your coat first of all. Is it wet? See, I will hang it here. When did you reach Borromeo?"

“I do not quite know; just before I reached here. There is a difficulty which I fear to own about taking off my coat.”

“And what is it?”

He looked at me with a comic lifting of the brows, humble and pleading.

“Lady, I am a famished man! Have you ever been on a Southern accommodation train for eight hours?”

“And you think I can not give you supper? If that is the difficulty decide to remain, I beg, at once.”

“If you had come at five, you see, all would have been well. I should have returned betimes to the Borromeo House, but now——”

“Now you will stay at my house, please.”

I was already preparing to lay the cloth on the round table drawn before the fire. A sudden misgiving made me put my finger to my lip.

“Well, what is it? Have you not food enough in the larder for such a hungry tramp as I? I do not require much. Give me simply such anchorite’s fare as you were going to give

yourself. A toothsome veal pasty with a haunch of venison, a brace of pheasants and plenty of good Rhenish to wash it down will suffice."

"Do you ever eat—rice flakes?"

The Doctor shook his head despondently.

"I was going to have them for my *pièce de resistance*, with bread *au beurre*, and tea *au citron*. Will you take the same?"

"I'll be hanged if I will," contemplatively. "What bird-seed women do live on if they dare! You need a beefsteak this minute. You look objectionably like the Lady Superior of a convent."

"Oh, you are going back to the hotel! Dr. Kirke, I have just thought! I can cook you two eggs, new laid too, pure as pearls, fabulous things at Christmas time in Florida! Won't you stay?"

"No, but I will return. I am going to get that beefsteak. Will you broil it, Mrs. Lloyd?"

"Gladly." The door closed.

It was rapid work. When he returned, the thick porterhouse, such as I had not seen in

many months, wrapped in brown paper under his arm, the table was set with all my best array, coffee was made, potatoes cooked brown, bread toasted, and a great bed of live coals lying ready.

When I sat down opposite him at the table a little later and grew bold to look fully into his face I saw that he looked wretchedly worn and jaded, in spite of the massive modeling of his features. Much of this may have been hunger, for when the meal was over I marked an access of firmness in line and color. The table cleared, I drew armchairs near the fire and we sat down together, all the badinage with which we had bridged over the first sharp emotion of meeting dying away. For an hour we talked only of Irving and all that preceded his death; rather I talked and Dr. Kirke listened with grave and mournful interest.

I spoke of the kindness and sympathy of all our friends, both here in Borromeo and in the North. Letters had been veritably a comfort. I never dreamed how truly such they could be.

Miss Kirke's had been, of all, the best; his also had been most kind. They had numbered (but this I did not say) in all, precisely two.

"It is strange," Dr. Kirke commented, his eyes with their old musing quietness resting upon my face, "how you have grown younger under it all. You are thinner, to be sure, but you look younger than you did the first time I saw you—in a way more girlish. There has been a very rare transformation." He seemed to be speaking to himself rather than to me, I thought.

"The first time you ever saw me you said something very strange of me—very awful," I said sadly. "I have always hoped you would unsay it some time."

"I was not aware of saying anything for you to hear. But the first time I saw you, you did, in fact, remind me of a picture by some Pre-raphaelite painter which I saw once in Wilmington."

"Lilith. I have seen a replica since in London."

He nodded gravely, but his eyes smiled.

“Now you remind me of Dante’s Beatrice. I mean as I think of her. No one has truly painted her.”

“Oh, no, no. You are quite mistaken in me if you think that. It is a long way from Lilith to Beatrice.”

“You are far more Beatrice now than ever you were Lilith, at least. Lilith was the *Ewigweibliche*, sinking to the mere body of woman’s beauty and charm. Beatrice is the woman essence rising to her ideal place—some one says it better; the ‘soul of humanity regaining full intuition of God.’”

Slow tears rose in my eyes and I shook my head, unable to speak, to make further denial.

Dr. Kirke leaned forward then and took both my hands in his and drew me toward him with a gentle, resistless strength.

“What pedants to sit quarreling here over Curious Myths of the Middle Ages! I do not care what you are like, Sidney, so you are like yourself. I love you, and it is for my wife I

love you and want you. I have come to Borromeo to tell you so. Tell me, my girl, can I win you?"

Soul and body yielded to his presence and power for one unspeakable moment. Then I drew away from his hands, from the arms which would have gathered me wholly to his heart.

"No," I said and rose from my chair, standing where I could rest an elbow on the pine chimney-shelf. "It is great and good—it is like you—to think of this, but it can not be."

"It can not!" with a falling cadence of poignant distress. He had risen too and stood facing me with those somber, threatening eyes, like Barbarossa's.

"No, never. But it is enough for me that you could desire such a thing—could dream that I could be worthy of—love like yours."

"It may be enough for you. It is not by any means enough for me. I have lived in dreams and desires long enough. I want realities now. I have heard your answer. Forgive me, but I can not accept it peacefully, submis-

sively. I came here for you—no, not for you. Think once more, Sidney, before you send me away like this.”

“I must not think. You must not let me change!” I murmured confusedly.

“It is no new thing, no sudden fancy, no reasonable, considered purpose that has brought me here. Men of my age sometimes think it wise to marry, and select complacently from their acquaintance the woman who seems best to serve their turn. I would not importune you, Sidney, like a craven, querulous fool if I had come like that. No! Listen to me. For two years, for more than that and never for one instant of conscious thought, have you been absent from my mind. Before that I did not trouble about you much. You had a strange charm for me, but I own I did not like you altogether, did not approve you for Irving’s wife. Then certain causes led me to a passing interest and concern in your affairs and I occupied myself with you in a moderate degree. Afterward I found your life possibly, your reason certainly,

your redemption perchance, in serious danger—all seemed pressed upon me for rescue. But to me you were hot, haughty, rebellious of control, determined never to yield your secret, or submit your will. I began to see the devilish forces arrayed against you; then the power, the pathos of your strange organization; the artistic and sensuous all to the fore, the moral in abeyance, but awakening; I saw the tremendous struggle you were waging, and would yet wage; the goddess-like sorrow you suffered over your own infirmity. All the manhood in me enlisted in your defense. But see! While I was thinking myself strong to be your champion, your shield and defender, suddenly one day, you, all unconsciously, rose and wounded my sword-arm and well-nigh threw me. I found that I loved you, I who had no right. The battle was turned and it was with myself I have had first of all to fight in your behalf, from that November day at twilight when I saw you wholly brought to bay; your reason itself imperiled, until now. I found you white and shaken, do you remember?—lift-

ing eyes of strange and awful boding to my face, the great, wounded, beaten soul pleading from them for—something, I knew not what.”

“A pilot. I had prayed,” I whispered. He flashed a look of comprehension in my face, then bent his head with gentlest reverence, and in the silence I saw what I had never seen before: a strong man’s tears. From head to foot I trembled before him, but still I stood my ground. He gave me one glance then, gathered himself together, and shook his head impatiently backward.

“You can not love me! I can not wonder. I am harsh, homely, clumsy, graceless, a very Vulcan of a man. What should a girl like you find to love in me?” He turned away from me and paced the floor. The pathetic bending of his powerful head as to a yoke of sorrow, the mighty shoulders suddenly seeming to express the burden of a weight of care, produced an effect which I could not wholly withstand.

“You shall have my reason,” I said steadily, forcing myself to calmness; “but when I have

told you what it is, and that it must be final—then, Dr. Kirke, will you promise me that you will go away and leave me? It is late, you see, almost ten.”

“Perfectly right,” he said with brief assent, “I will go. You should have ordered me out before. Speak, please.”

He stood then at a short distance, the table with its lamp and books and papers between us. His hands were behind him; his head dropped forward; thought sat heavily upon his brow, which was yet calm, judicial. It was thus the Doctor looked, I knew, when a case of mortal issue lay before him.

“I can not be your wife because I love you too much—have loved you all the way. If I loved you less I could be your wife.”

“And now?——”

“I will not.”

He bowed as if in submission, but a change swifter than a lightning-flash passed over him. Sudden power and illumination proceeded from his form and face. The homely, careworn, bur-

dened man who had been pleading with me as for his life became imposing, splendid, awe-inspiring. He pleaded no more.

"You will not, but I will," his look plainly said. However, aloud he said simply, "Good night. May I see you for a little while before I leave, to-morrow night?"

"You start back then so soon?"

"Yes, by the eleven o'clock train. May I come about eight?"

"Yes, or earlier. I shall be in school all day, or I would see you sooner."

"I shall do very well. I mean to ask that young preacher you like so much, Irving's friend——"

"Mr. Loring."

"Yes. I had forgotten the name. I shall get him if I can to go out with me for the day in somebody's sailboat."

"That is good. You will enjoy it, and I know he will be glad to go. Good night."

XXVIII

“PRODUCE your reasons!”

The night was as mild as in a Northern September; the sky was brilliant with stars. We had walked together through the pines and beyond us now lay the sand barrens and the sea, with its long withdrawing roar. Over it, eastward, hung the young moon, an inverted crescent.

“My reasons are chiefly three, but the first one alone is enough. We need not touch the others.”

“The first then.”

“Dr. Kirke, I love you too much to let you marry, if I can help it, a woman with a tarnished name.”

Plainly this was anticipated. An indefinable slackening of the tension in him followed.

“That is your first worst. I weigh it in the

balance and pronounce it—naught. Your name to-day, my girl, is clean, every whit. You have sailed a gallant course, and your friends have watched you.”

He felt an involuntary grateful touch then on his hand, but it was gone when he would have stayed it.

“But, Dr. Kirke, that is only the outer rim of the trouble. The real trouble is—I have not been a good woman. You do not know and you shall now. Then you will see.”

“I fear nothing you can tell me, Sidney. Say on.”

There was a pause.

“May I tell you slowly, with some things far back in the past?”

“As slowly as you will, dear child. See, here is a fallen tree. Will you sit down?”

“I do not want to keep back anything. I can not bear it to find how much better you think me than I am.”

Another brief silence. Then I began slowly.

“I saw a half-burned sheet of paper one day

—useless, meaningless, scorched, shriveled as it lay in the ashes. You know how it would look.”

“ I know.”

“ It was when I was at your house that I saw how my life was like that. I saw that I had been through the fire and was spoiled for beauty and purity and noble service. I remember asking myself over and over in what fire my soul had been burned. My mind was weak; my spiritual vision weaker yet. I could not discern it. Later I saw, and I found then the key to the cipher of my whole past life.”

“ Few persons go so far.”

“ It has been the fire of vanity—that poor, trite, pitiful thing which I fancied belonged only to an old-time Pilgrim’s Progress notion of things. It is oh, so real, I have found, so cruel, mercenary, devouring—a consuming fire, starting too from such a little spark. I was not a vain girl at first. I was not vain enough, my mother thought. I did not care to attract admiration nor did I miss it that men did not follow me as they did others. Then some small

things, commonplace at most, happened and suddenly the thing awoke in me like a hungry animal, the passion for admiration, and sought its own satisfaction and cared for nothing else at heart. Year by year it grew bolder, more reckless, more tyrannous. My very marriage was based upon the soothing of my pride, before that wounded. Why was there no one, Dr. Kirke, in those years to warn me? No one to tell me that but one life was mine, and that if I gave that to the sense I could not give it to the spirit? That if I gave it to the flesh I must taste the bitterness of corruption, as I have done? It all seemed so light and harmless then. Sometimes, in these later years, I have fairly hated this body, these senses—for they have devoured all the glories and delights of earth, and sky in their coarse, selfish greed of luxury.”

“You overrate this. You have been considered a woman of intellectual and artistic tastes, always.”

“Yes, and it was in me to be that and more.

I have some good capacities. But, Dr. Kirke, you can not understand a woman. Even the things which came through these higher channels, the beauty of art, of poetry, all the esthetic life, were in the end captured as booty by this tyrant of vanity. I decked my body, my mind, my stage, with them as accessories to myself, the more to win praise and draw the men who met me to my feet. So I cheapened the best things of life, yes, the very best, for I even turned the sacred privileges of Christ's Church to the commerce of self-advancement. How base, how terrible it sounds, but it is bare truth! Irving and I joined that church in Boston simply because we thought it would help us to gain position, money."

"Did any one ever talk to you about religion?"

"Mr. Owen certainly never did. No, I think no one. When I was a girl I caught up a superficial habit, common at my age perhaps, of ridiculing and mocking the old forms of thought and speech and practise common to the Chris-

tian people. But do you know, Dr. Kirke, compared with the vulgarity, the crass, sordid meanness of a soulless life, such as mine has been, the humblest, quaintest old colored mammy down here who cherishes her religion as her chief good, is a spiritual aristocrat! Compared with the mercenary maxims of the world in which I have lived, the tritest phrases of those old religionists seem stately and splendid, for whatever they missed, they always spoke of two things—the soul and God. These were left out in my program of life. Self, sense, the pride of life, took their place.”

“You have drawn a great arraignment—less of yourself than of a prevalent type, however. I warn you that I shall not accept it for a moment as an argument on your side.”

“Wait until you see how it fared with me when I met—Ross Kimball.”

“You were in danger then.”

“And you perceived it? When, first?”

“That night at the Club reception. I watched the man while he danced with you.”

“Was it you who sent your sister to me, with that warning?”

“We agreed together to compass your protection, if it was in our power.”

“And that was when you did not like me?”

“Yes. But no man was ever indifferent to you, Sidney.”

“And on shipboard. Did you dislike me then?”

“No, but you depressed me. I will tell you frankly, at that time I feared the nature of your relation to Ross Kimball. That was before I knew you.”

“It is not strange.”

“Before the voyage was over I was convinced of my mistake. Sarah and I made up our minds deliberately then to surround you, unknown to yourself, with all the defense and guarding we could devise. You helped us by opening the way to a possible basis for better acquaintance.”

“Then, Dr. Kirke, it was I who was being led gently along when I fancied it was you? It

would be amusing if it were not so dreadful. So it was I who was being encompassed, after all!"

"In a sense. You must not sit here any longer, Sidney. This heavy dew is making your clothing damp. Shall we walk back?"

"Oh, what a guardian angel Sarah Kirke has been to me!"

"Sarah has been no more an angel than I. Who do you suppose stood guard that night while you were up in that infernal tower-room of Ross Kimball's?"

"Dr. Kirke! How can you have known? I supposed the existence of that room an absolute secret."

He shook his head. "There was mischief abroad that night. It was in the air. It was in that man's face when he watched you. It was in the exuberance of your own spirit. You were thrillingly dangerous that night to the sense of a man; what was more, you were self-intoxicated."

I was startled and no wonder. Nothing had escaped this man's vision, it seemed.

“I was wholly ignorant of the existence of that room, but I was not so ignorant of the workings of Kimball’s mind. I have known him well in the past, much better than he has supposed. I was convinced that that night of triumph would not pass without a diabolical effort on his part to win from you some crucial token or promise. I went there only because I believed you would need some one to guard you. There was little, however, that I could do.”

“Tell me all, Dr. Kirke. I guessed afterward that you had watched me for some reason, and like the idiot I was, I resented it.”

“I remember,” and he smiled drily. “Yes, I watched you systematically, determined not to leave you undefended one moment while you were in that house. So it happened that I was on the north terrace with my eyes wide open when you went up to the second floor of the tower. And I came around and listened for your return by that outer door on the south terrace. As I listened I did the only other thing for you in my power. I prayed. I believed that

if all were well you would return by the way you went, and very soon. You were gone a little more than eight minutes."

"Yes, that is precise."

"But you came back by the wrong way. If you had been gone ten minutes you would have heard a knocking like the knocking in Macbeth on that door. But when I heard the knob turn I crossed rapidly in the shadow to the great south entrance and awaited you there. You may remember."

"Perfectly."

"Why are you crying so?"

"To think you were so watching over me in that awful time."

"I saw your face as I stopped your flying feet. I saw signs of a mortal battle. Oh, Sidney!" and he ground his teeth. "And I had stood down there like a stock or stone, unable to lift my hand! I have never known what I said when I stopped you, your face put me in such a rage. My only thought was to let you know that you could summon me if you were

still in need. Then presently I saw you drive away and thanked God that at last you were safe."

"Dr. Kirke, you spoke just now of that unknown room above the library. That room had been prepared for clandestine visits from me. If you had seen it you could better understand."

"I have seen it. I understand. Let my part go till later, though."

"Ah, then you know the terrible beauty of it, how the man had calculated each smallest detail to make an irresistible appeal to my sense. He was so sure of my love of luxury and my love of using my power over him—the Lilith side of me!"

"The devil!"

"Was ever deeper shame than this complete confidence of his? I believe in all his elaborate preparation he never doubted the issue."

"He is accustomed to succeed in all he undertakes. That makes a man insolent."

"But don't you see, Dr. Kirke, that Ross

Kimball is too prudent a man and too intelligent to have done all that with no reason? Now, surgeon, the wound is open for you to probe to its very core. *He was justified in his estimate of me by what had gone before between us.* I had let him say things, look things, which no true wife permits a man to say to her or to look."

My voice had sunk to a trembling whisper. Dr. Kirke simply bent his head and waited. We were standing now on the hither edge of the pines, and it was mercifully too dark for us to see each other's faces.

"Have I not told you truly that I have not been a good woman?" I continued mournfully. "I had seen my danger, seen it from the very first. No woman could have failed to see it, whatever she might say. I believed in myself sufficiently to dare to dally with the danger, and expect to escape. That was all."

"But what was the motive, the object, the gain?"

"Oh, the pity of it, the pity of it! The infi-

nite littleness! Just the need of money and more money for Irving, of name and power and position for us both. Just the flattery of my pride, the satisfaction to my vanity in having this man my thrall."

"Did you ever care for him?"

"He satisfied a certain side of me, but not the side that loves. He appealed to my taste, and in a subtle, cynical way to my intellect. Most of all I think to my pride and my love of power. I liked him that he could control men. I knew he was not good, and yet I let him think he could control me. Now you must admit that you have not truly known me or you could never have wished to marry me."

"On the contrary, your spiritual diagnosis of yourself coincides with what I have always known it to be, Sidney—a magnificently natural, sensuous pagan creature, with a soul appallingly slow in awakening to God. But it has awakened and God was not too late. When God inbreathes the breath of life the man becomes a living soul in the highest sense. Life is just a

stuff to 'try the soul's strength on,' you know—to 'educate the man.' You have had a bitter struggle and you have won. But you are trembling, Sidney. Do not let us recall these bitter memories. Come, you must not shiver so. We will go back to the house now and you shall have a fire and better cheer."

A match was struck and the watch consulted.

"It is growing late, after nine."

"When must you start for the station?"

"At half-past ten."

"We will go back then. There is little more to say, only I wanted just to tell you that when I saw that room and understood, God helped me to hate him, and myself and all the foul taint of the atmosphere we had been living in, and I ran for very life away from it all. Then I saw you who had been praying for me to God."

"And somewhere on the way you were grievously hurt, my poor Sidney."

"Yes, on the stair. I was so afraid that I ran, and could not see quite where I went, and so plunged against that cruel iron rail."

“And all those weeks you hid your pain and your danger!”

“Yes, I was afraid of you. I knew you would divine something of the truth whatever plea I might make.”

“Spartan! You were properly punished in the end. Poor plucky little Sidney! I wanted to help you, but you would not let me. I used to wish I had you in a hospital, where I would have made short work of all your obstinacy and your rubbishy fibbing.”

“But tell me now how it ever could have chanced that you yourself saw that tower room. Have they done something with it?”

“You remember that afternoon, I have spoken of it already—when I made that very short call toward night?”

“The day before I went to your house? Yes.”

“That afternoon, an hour earlier, I had been summoned urgently and rather mysteriously by telephone to Ross Kimball’s. The man who telephoned—I found afterward that it was Lit, the

confidential valet—asked me to leave my carriage in front of the gates and come on foot, if I would, to the small grade door on the north terrace. I did so and was admitted by Lit himself. He was plainly scared to death for several different reasons, but instinct and training had been sufficient to make him keep still. I was taken up that iron stair and into the upper room. Of course, I perceived in passing, by the construction, that it was the only room on that floor of the tower, and therefore I knew that it was to it that Mr. Kimball must have taken you that night, six weeks earlier. The room was marvelously lighted and of the extraordinary beauty you know. I looked for signs of confusion, for I saw at once that Mr. Kimball was lying on the floor insensible. The only disorder was a woman's gown, white silk I should think, lying in a careless heap in a corner, as if it had been flung there. A pastel portrait on an easel of a woman—by her pose and color she instantly suggested you—had been cut several times across the face with a sharp blade. I noticed

no other disorder. I found Mr. Kimball breathing heavily and suffering from a stroke of apoplexy, not, however, severe. Lit had been in the library below and had heard him fall. He possessed pass-keys to the place, and so ran up and at once discovered his master's condition. That was the whole story."

"Was Mr. Kimball in danger?"

"He could have been easily enough if I had let him."

There was a certain grimness in the reply.

"I also had my moment of temptation in that room, Sidney."

There was a moment's pause.

"We brought him out all right in a short time and as soon as he could speak he began to explain about Mrs. Kimball's boudoir which he had been fitting up himself with such pains and so forth. I picked up his penknife while he was talking and laid it on the table. I couldn't stand his lies very well just then, and so gave him to understand that talking would be sure death to him. I helped Lit after a little to carry him

down to the library, and got away as soon as I could. I had to go back to him, though, in the evening."

"I read in the paper after I returned from your house that he had had grippe."

"Yes. The usual thing. He will have grippe again by and by. Some other doctor will have the case, however."

We had reached the house now and soon had taken our former seats by the fire which we found burning cheerily in expectation of our return. A mulatto jewel, who had been my occasional helper ever since we came to Borromeo, had been retained for the evening. She now brought in coffee and we took it together in silence and were glad of the space to rest.

"Now then for secondly and thirdly," said Dr. Kirke, with a glance at the clock, when we were alone again. It was twenty minutes then, I observed, before ten.

"I think firstly must have been enough."

"Firstly has lost your case for you, Sidney, completely. I will hear secondly."

“You will not understand it, I know. A man could not. But when I said if I loved you less I would marry you I meant exactly that. I love you, as I have for two years, religiously and with a power which I think few women ever know. But I do not think the love I have for you is the basis for marriage. You are so great to me, so exalted, so next to God, that I fear you as much as I love you, and that fear is—strange, you will think—a thing I worship and cling to. My love is ideal, impossible to sustain on the same plane if put to the test of domesticity; I can not see it change and decline to the level of the average married life. I can not bear to discover the heel of my great Achilles. To tell the truth, Dr. Kirke, I think I never had a talent for marriage. The details and demands of it repel me. I prefer my own ascetic restraint to the larger constraint which it involves. It may be that I am supercivilized, overrefined, cowardly even. You will probably say so. But I wish to see you at intervals—not too long if you please, Dr. Kirke—and I should be pleased to think you cared for

me a little. In any event I shall love you as I have done. It is my life. In this way we shall both retain our illusions; and if we have to traverse wide plains of dead and dreary endurance, we shall at least now and then, when we meet, climb to a summit of impossible joy—like this!”

He smiled upon me with exceeding benevolence.

“I see. However, granting that a husband is always likely to become a lost illusion, it is certainly not so with a child. It is a thwarting of nature for a woman of your superb physique and endowment to miss motherhood.”

“I have thought of that too, but I am more afraid of that in one way than of the other.”

“You can not convince me that you are a coward, do your best.”

“No, it is not exactly that this time. But you see I fear what you call my endowment. See how nearly fatal it has been to myself. I dare not hand it down with all its pitfalls and perils to another generation.”

“That is a mistaken view. You were all

right at the start if this demon of vanity had not been aroused in you, and you had a strong native virtue to meet it with. A robust sensuousness, moreover, is no bad thing to graft upon the old Puritan stock. Go on. I cancel secondly. Let us have thirdly."

Thirdly was to have been my deep satisfaction in the simple, solitary, nunlike life I had been living in Borromeo, but as I sat now with the Doctor's eyes resting full upon me with their brooding tenderness I essayed to speak but faltered. A curious unreality and blight seemed to have overtaken that life of ordered and stringent discipline. Its charm had fled. I did not speak.

"There is no thirdly. Exactly as I expected. Very well then, Sidney, why should we not be married before I take my train?"

I stared at him in speechless wonder.

"Mr. Loring will be here now in a few minutes. I asked him to come for the sake of the walk back together, ostensibly; really because I foresaw that we might require his services."

“I do not comprehend.”

“It is, however, very simple, very safe, very beautiful—to me. None of your reasons has the slightest weight with me. I decline to accept them—even at the risk of declining from my present august proportions to the paltry commonplaceness of a husband; even at the risk of showing my heel—I wonder which one it is! I will promise to keep you afraid of me, however, fast enough. There will be no trouble about that part of it.”

“Yes, there is your temper. But, Dr. Kirke, I could not be married now!”

“I do not ask you to go with me, or to announce a marriage. Sidney, I only ask the privilege of the right to protect you and care for you. I am never without a fear of trouble coming to you again from that same quarter. If it comes you must have a man upon whom you dare to call. I can not leave you here alone unless I have the right to defend you.”

“I have been afraid.”

“Naturally you have. But you need not be

any more. Let our marriage take place to-night; there is still time—and let it remain unknown save to ourselves and the witnesses. I will promise not to intrude upon you in any way until summer, unless you call for me. If you need me, telegraph. You can teach your school and carry on this nun's life here, which you like so much, to your heart's content, until the term's end. When is that?"

"The first of June, Dr. Kirke."

"Then the second of June I will come again. The marriage can be announced and then, at that time I warn you there will be no escape for you. I shall carry you back with me then, my girl. I shall claim you forever, until death us do part."

We had risen and with these words he took me in his strong, sheltering embrace, and there I was glad at last to rest without further question or gainsaying. His eyes searched mine solemnly, profoundly.

"And thereto I give thee my troth."

I could only whisper the words. A long kiss was given.

As I turned to dash away the tears which blinded my eyes a step was heard by both of us on the walk. The clock struck ten. Dr. Kirke remarked in his most matter-of-fact tone,

“That must be Loring.”



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